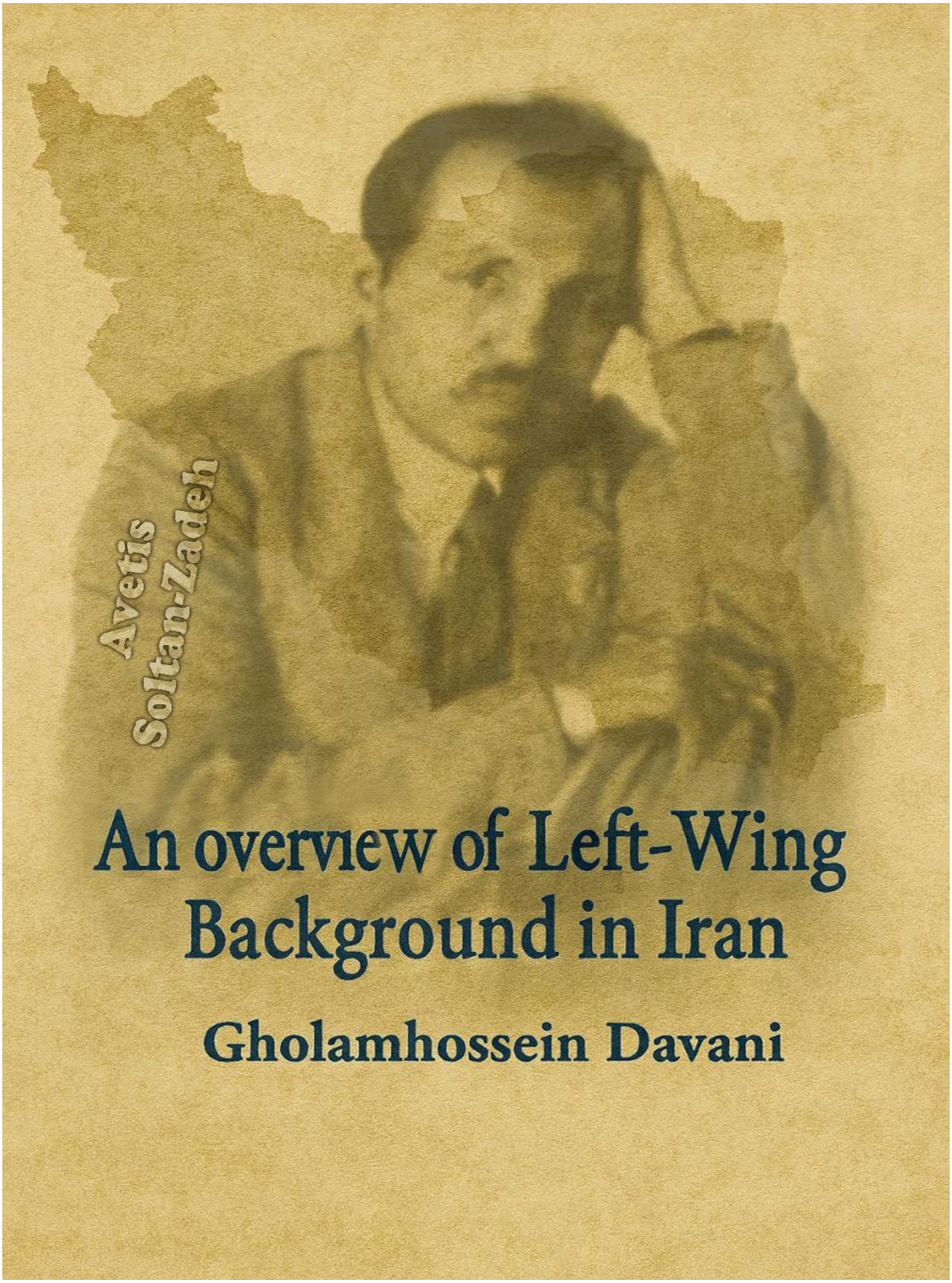

An overview of Left-Wing Background in Iran

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Overview of the Left's Background in Iran

Before beginning the discussion, it is necessary to emphasize that in this text, the term *left* is understood in its broad sense: any individual or movement that seeks to change the existing situation toward a better state, in the direction of social progress and advancement, and actively works for such transformation can, to some degree, be considered leftist. I underline three factors here: first, the desire for change; second, the direction of that change; and third, activity in pursuit of that change.

In the past, the direction of change was assumed to be progressive by default, but in today's world, with the regressive rise of religious fundamentalism and the far right, this is no longer the case. There are movements that demand change but in the direction of social regression. Progressive change, by contrast, encompasses political, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects—namely, the pursuit of a freer society, the expansion of material and economic opportunities, social justice, and popular participation in decision-making. This broad spectrum ranges from those who merely advocate limited reforms to those who demand fundamental social and economic transformation, including the socialist left that calls for a transition beyond capitalism.

Where Do "Left" and "Right" Come From?

The political terms *left* and *right* originate in the French Revolution. In 1789, during the revolution, members of the National Assembly were divided according to where they sat: opponents of the monarchy and advocates of major social and political reforms sat on the left side of the chamber, while defenders of traditional hierarchies and opponents of radical reforms sat on the right. Over time, these terms developed into broader categories to describe political orientations.

Traditionally, *the left* referred to social movements seeking fundamental transformations in society and greater equality, while *the right* denoted tendencies favoring the preservation of the existing order, traditions, and hierarchies. Today, these terms are still widely used to describe political parties and orientations across countries, although their precise meanings vary across cultural contexts. For instance, in the United States and Canada, *the left* is generally associated with liberalism, whereas *the right* is linked to conservatism.

Part One – The Beginning of Decline in the Qajar Era

Iran's historical decline occurred between 1713–1828 (1192–1207 AH), following its wars with Russia and the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay. These treaties—engineered by reactionary clerics and the pleasure-seeking king Fath Ali Shah—resulted in the loss of over 250,000 square kilometers of northern provinces to Tsarist Russia. Consequently, the inhabitants of Azerbaijan, the Caucasus, Shirvan, Ganja, and northern Talesh became Russian subjects, while many of their relatives remained in other Iranian provinces.

Later, between 1855–1900 (1234–1279 AH), many Iranians migrated to the Caucasus and Baku in search of work and livelihood. This migration facilitated connections between Iranian laborers and the local working-class population in their struggle against Tsarism and in labor strikes.

From the Safavid period onward, after the decline of hostilities between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, many Iranians settled in Istanbul and other Ottoman border cities, engaging in trade and business.

The dispatch of Iranian students abroad for education began under the Safavids as part of Iran's closer relations with Europe. Shah Abbas II, for instance, sent several young men, including Mohammad Zaman Khan, to Italy to study painting. Most of these students were from Azerbaijan and Turkic-speaking families. Many of them later became active in the Constitutional Revolution. After Iran's defeats in its wars with Russia, Abbas Mirza—encouraged by his vizier, Mirza Bozorg Qaem-Maqam—sent the first students to Europe for modern education despite many challenges. During the Qajar period, in six phases, nearly 100 students were dispatched to Europe at government expense. Many later returned to occupy positions as ministers, deputies, and state officials.

Although Iran in the 18th and 19th centuries was never formally colonized, encounters with the West, combined with military defeats at the hands of Russia and Britain and their subsequent "peaceful penetration," left Iran in a state of dependency. Out of necessity, Iran turned to Western civilization, though because of geographical distance and limited direct contact with Europe, Iranians largely encountered modernity through Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and India. Iranians living in the Caucasus traveled frequently to and from Iran, especially to border provinces like Azerbaijan and Gilan, while Persian communities in India maintained close ties with southern provinces and the Persian Gulf.

The first socialist experiment in history—the Paris Commune of 1871 (1250 AH)—coincided with the discovery of the first oil well in Baku. It is noteworthy that Iran's first oil well would not be discovered until 1908 (1287 AH) in Masjed Soleyman, nearly four decades later. Baku's oil fields rapidly expanded to 1,700 wells within 30 years. At the time, Baku, with its 112,000 inhabitants, was nearly as populous as Tehran (150,000). As a result, poor Iranian peasants from across the borderlands, particularly Iranian Azerbaijan, flocked to Baku to seek work in the oil fields and other industries of the Caucasus.

Working conditions were dire. Even though the Iranian consulate was aware of the illegal cross-border movement of laborers, it exploited them by extorting fees. Still, Iranian workers continued to flow into the Caucasus in large numbers. At one point, as many as 300,000 Iranians annually left provinces like Gilan, Azerbaijan, and Khorasan for Russia. Iranian laborers came to comprise 5 percent of the industrial workforce of Transcaucasia and 50 percent of Baku's oil workers.

Between 1901 and 1904 (1280–1283 AH), the Russian Social Democratic Party led numerous strikes in Baku, Tbilisi, and Batumi. By participating in these strikes, Iranian workers gained their first experiences of organized struggle and class-based political action.

Part Two – The First Conference of the Edālat Party

After the suppression of the *Social Democrats of the Masses* (*Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun*), the Democrats who had insisted on revolutionary positions and pursued them with some consistency—represented by the Democratic Party—were dispersed, and most were forced into exile. Yet the struggle and activity of the *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun* did not cease. During the First World War (1914–1918)—when Iran, despite its declaration of neutrality, was effectively occupied by the two blocs of imperialist powers, the Central Powers and the Allies—the people's struggle continued both inside and outside the country, with the *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun* remaining at the forefront.

Haydar Khan, who had been forced to leave Iran, also went to Europe and continued his activities in exile. The Iranian Social Democrats, following the defeat of the Constitutional Revolution, carried on their work during the war both inside Iran and abroad—in Western Europe and especially in Russia.

At the start of the war (1914/1293 AH), a group of *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun* militants and oil workers from Baku, led by Asadollah Ghafarzadeh (Sadr Mirza Aghvam), Katib, Bahram Aghayev, and Baba Hashemzadeh—after Aghvam was killed in an armed clash with Musavatists in Ismailia—declared themselves the "Edālat" (Justice) group. Among them were Rustam Karimzadeh, Seyfollah Ebrahimzadeh, and others who organized protests and workers' demonstrations.

Following the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia, with the fall of the Tsarist regime and the formation of Kerensky's bourgeois government, Azerbaijani and Iranian revolutionaries residing in Russia found the opportunity to conduct open political activity, to organize, and to establish their leadership centers.

By May 1917 (Ordibehesht 1296), the Iranian Social Democrats (*Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun*) formally established the "Edālat Party" in Baku. They published their program in both Azerbaijani (detailed) and Persian (abridged). The Persian edition stated, on page 12:

"Among the demands of Justice is that the principles of life and livelihood must fundamentally be transformed in accordance with the law of socialism, so that the fruits of labor may not belong solely to the wealthy."

At the same time, the *Himmat* (Endeavor) group also began organizational and propaganda work, publishing its own newspaper. In its first issue (July 3, 1917 / 12 Tir 1296), *Himmat* declared its main objective to be the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism, calling on "all Muslims, workers, toilers, and enlightened intellectuals with awakened consciences" to rally under the banner of the *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun*.

The victory of the October Revolution opened a new historical era. Iranian workers and migrants in Russia gained broader opportunities for socio-political activity and for building their own party. Although these opportunities were curtailed by August 1918 (Mordad 1297), when imperialist powers intervened militarily against the new Soviet state and occupied its southern regions, the *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun* continued their struggle underground within the *Himmat* and *Edālat* organizations.

When the threat of British occupation of Baku arose—backed by the SRs, Musavatists, Dashnaks, and others—on July 17, 1918 (Tir 1297), a revolutionary conference was convened. Its resolution called on both *Edālat* and *Himmat* to issue a joint declaration urging all members to join the army in defense of the revolution.

After Baku fell to the British in August 1918, the first Central Committee of *Edālat* was dissolved (September 1918 / Shahrivar 1297). However, party activity continued until March 1919 (Esfand 1297), when the second Central Committee of *Edālat* was established. It began publishing underground journals, *Hormat* and *Yoldash*, in both Persian and Azerbaijani. On March 20, 1919, the party sent a message of congratulations to the founding congress of the Third Communist International (Comintern), initiated and led by Lenin in Moscow.

The historical record shows that although this movement and party were established largely by individuals from outside Iran—born in Baku and the Caucasus—and under the guidance of the Comintern and with assistance from the Russian Social Democrats, its foundation lay in the socio-economic realities of Iran. It developed organically from the necessities of Iran's historical trajectory while remaining intrinsically tied to proletarian internationalism. Moreover, one should recall that Baku and the Caucasus had been part of Iran before the reign of Fath Ali Shah.

Lenin and his comrades maintained close contact with revolutionaries and Social Democrats from other countries, including Muslim nations—such as Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli and Sultan-Zadeh from Iran, Mustafa Subhi from Turkey, and others—providing them with counsel and organizational support. This proletarian internationalism, a defining feature of the workers' and communist movement and the source of its strength, was always a target of hostility from its opponents.

Interestingly, some researchers regard Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi (al-Afghani) as one of the earliest heralds of socialism in Iran. After Mirza Yusef Khan Mustashar al-Dowleh's *Treatise on One Word* (Paris, 1287/1870), which for the first time in Persian literature discussed the constitution and its necessity for Iran—and led to the author's ruin and death—Seyyed Jamal al-Din, eleven years later, openly raised the issue of forms of government (republic, constitutional monarchy, or absolutism) in Iran. For this, he was exiled by Naser al-Din Shah.

Part Three – Activities of the Edālat Party in Iran

Historical evidence makes it clear that the history of the Communist Party of Iran cannot be separated from the history of Iran's contemporary anti-imperialist and national struggles. The *Edālat Party* maintained contact with revolutionaries inside Iran, with members moving back and forth between Baku and Iran.

In May 1918 (Ordibehesht 1297), the party sent 18 members under the leadership of Asadollah Ghafarzadeh to establish contact with Mirza Kuchak Khan. Only three reached Iran, and even they failed to meet with him. Ghafarzadeh himself was killed in Rasht due to the intrigues of opponents.

In subsequent years, the party dispatched further groups to connect with existing organizations inside Iran. Documents and memoirs of *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun* activists—such as Kamran Aghazadeh, Dadash Hosseinzadeh, Ali Askar Alizadeh, and others—show that by late 1919 (Azar 1297), their groups were active in Tabriz, Tehran, Rasht, Qazvin, Zanjan, Mashhad, Mazandaran, Marand, Khoy, Ardabil, and Khalkhal.

Amidst the difficulties of underground activity, in early 1920 preparations began for the formation of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. On February 11, 1920 (Bahman 1298), the *Himmat* and *Edālat* parties in Baku formally merged into the local organizations of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks), creating the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. At the same time, a "Central Committee" of the *Edālat Party*, led by Yusefzadeh and Seyyed Jafar Pishevari, was formed to continue handling matters related to Iranian *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun*.

In the same month, the Central Committee sent Ali Khanzadeh and Fathollahzadeh to convene a conference of its organizations in Central Asia, where *Edālat* groups existed in more than 50 towns and villages. From April 1–3, 1920 (Farvardin 1299), a conference was held in Tashkent with 17 official delegates and several guests. Representatives of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan, and the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern greeted the conference.

Reports were presented by Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli on the political and economic situation in Iran, Ali Khanzadeh on party tactics, Mustafa Subhi (founder of the Turkish Communist Party) on organizational matters, and Sultan-Zadeh (Avetis Mikaelian) on the formation of workers' and peasants' councils.

Avetis Sultan-Zadeh Mikaelian (b. 1898), a leading theorist of the Iranian Communist Party, was born in Maragheh (East Azerbaijan) to a poor family of a Muslim father and Christian mother. He was later executed in Stalin's purges of 1938.

Members of the Central Committee included Avetis Sultan-Zadeh, Jafar Javadzadeh, Kamran Aghazadeh, Baterbek Abukov, Matilda Bola, Seyyed Gholi Haddadzadeh, Nemat Basir, and Mohammad Gholi Alikhanov. Among the key resolutions of the conference was the necessity of full support for Iran's democratic and national liberation movement.

Part Four – The First Marxist Socio-Economic Analysis of Iranian Society

In the summer of 1905, a group of 28 Armenians in Tabriz with Marxist leanings gathered to play a role in the struggles of different social classes against monarchical despotism and its powerful external patron, Tsarist Russia. This group became known in historical records as the *Tabriz Social Democratic Group*.

Its members, intellectuals connected with the broader world beyond Iran, had been influenced by the labor and social democratic movements in the Caucasus. Within the group, two different analyses of Iranian society emerged, leading to two tactical approaches.

- **First current**: argued that Iran had entered the capitalist stage, with industrial production emerging alongside large workshops. As a result, peasants and small artisans were being transformed into proletarians, and this process was expanding. Their task was therefore socialist organization of the working class. Leading figures of this current included Arshavir Chelengirian and Vasa Khachatourian.
- **Second current**: held that Iran had only recently embarked on the path toward capitalism but had not yet reached an industrial stage. The struggle, therefore, had to take democratic form aligned with constitutionalist demands. Its main theorists were Sedrak Avakian and Veram Pilossian.

Arshavir Chelengirian, representing the leftist current, corresponded with leading figures of the Second International such as Karl Kautsky, and wrote an analytical article on Iranian society published in *Neue Zeit*, the organ of the German Social Democratic Party, on May 20, 1910. Entitled *The Economic and Social Roots of the Iranian Revolution*, it had been written in November 1909.

Chelengirian, an Armenian from Tabriz and employee of the Imperial Bank of Persia in that city, presented in nine sections a socio-economic and political analysis of Iranian society. He emphasized from the outset that economic development across the globe did not proceed uniformly, and that Iran lagged behind its neighbors. He observed that Iran's modes of production had remained largely unchanged for centuries, shaping a deeply rooted social order.

He examined limited commerce in Iran, largely confined to major cities, and highlighted how foreign trade, dominated by imports of manufactured goods (metalware, sugar, tea, oil) from European powers, had left Iran with a negative trade balance. He linked this to the influx of foreign capital, establishing credit houses and banks—especially Russian and British—whose operations reached hundreds of millions of tomans. His analysis showed a clear awareness of international monopolistic capitalism, with emphasis on banking and usury capital.

Chelengirian also discussed the power of feudal landlords, the intensification of peasant exploitation, and the persistence of semi-autonomous *khans*. He mistakenly assumed that capitalist development had already brought political centralization, while in fact the Iranian state remained plagued by fragmentation until the rise of Reza Shah.

He further analyzed land ownership, rent, and peasant taxation, though with limited accuracy, a subject later addressed in greater detail by Avetis Sultan-Zadeh in *Modern Iran*.

Chelengirian stressed the collusion of political elites and landlords in hoarding and speculation, leading to artificial famines such as that of 1895. He noted the rising power of the Shiʿi clergy, whose religious endowments (*waqf*) gave them enormous economic and political clout, even capable of nullifying state decrees.

In conclusion, he highlighted how Iranian intellectuals emerged from the decline of feudalism, many educated in Europe, though their hopes often ended in disappointment. He connected Iran's upheavals to the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Russian Revolution, which inspired Iranian activism leading to the Constitutional Revolution.

Chelengirian's final point was that although Iran's revolution erupted unexpectedly, the commercial bourgeoisie quickly assumed leadership. Unlike the French bourgeoisie of the Enlightenment, however, Iranian merchants remained devoutly religious, reluctant to challenge clerical power. He left the question open: would the peasantry, having seized landlords' lands, settle for mere political reforms, or would deeper transformations follow?

The key contributions of his analysis lay in two areas: foreign trade and the powerful role of the Shiʿi clergy. The absence of serious consideration of these issues in much of Iran's leftist discourse later proved disastrous during the 1979 Revolution.

Yet Chelengirian's article also suffered weaknesses, notably the lack of attention to Iran's nascent working class—both in urban guilds and among migrant workers in the Caucasus—despite his recognition of capitalist development.

The Second Socio-Economic and Political Analysis of Iranian Society:

Modern Iran by Avetis Mikailian (A. Sultan-Zadeh)

The victory of the October Revolution (1917) opened, for its leaders—especially V. I. Lenin—a pathway to launching a global revolution beginning in modern, industrial Europe. The establishment of the Communist International (Comintern), the Third International, and its boundary-drawing against the so-called socialist and social-democratic parties loyal to the politics and tactics of the Second International, followed precisely from this perspective. As leaders of the October Revolution and of the new international organization, they sought structured, organizational ties with radical socialists and revolutionary worker-activists in Europe, pursuing a policy of assisting and kindling revolution on the continent. The Soviet Republic in Hungary (21 March–26 June 1919) and the war against Pilsudski's right-wing regime in Poland (May 1920) lent great importance to the Comintern at the moment of its formation.

The defeat of the revolutionary movements in Germany and Hungary, the stalling of militant labor upsurges in other capitalist countries, and the continued dominance of social-democratic unions over European workers dimmed the Comintern leadership's hopes for imminent revolution in the West.

Lenin, for his part, argued that imperialism—as monopoly capitalism on a world scale—had focused not only on exporting commodities but also on exporting capital (i.e., the transformed surplus value of production) to pre-capitalist societies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. This "super-profit" from capital export enabled the creation of a powerful labor aristocracy in Europe, diverting the workers' movement from revolutionary struggle toward reformism and narrow trade-unionism. Among Comintern theorists, the Indian communist M. N. Roy went further, holding that the severing of ties between the metropolitan capitalist countries and their colonies, and the consequent revolution in the East, would strike at "the very foundation of the entire capitalist system." In this view, national anti-imperialist struggles in colonial and semi-colonial countries could fill the void left by the dampened revolutions in the West and become their driving motor. This perspective had a material basis in the liberation movements rising across the East. From the early twentieth century to 1919, political and military movements in China, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Korea, Indonesia, and India surged against the imperial dominance of Britain and France, giving rise to associations and parties with nationalist and, at times, social-democratic tendencies. Accordingly, a substantial portion of the Second Comintern Congress focused on how to relate to these movements in the colonized and semi-colonized East.

After the Second Congress of the Comintern (7 August 1920 / 16 Khordad 1299 SH) and the publication of the "National and Colonial Question" resolution by its National and Colonial Commission, Comintern leaders and the vanguard of Asian communists adopted a new approach toward Eastern countries. The founding of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in April 1921 (Ordibehesht 1300 SH), the acceleration of efforts to establish "communist" parties in Asia, and the Congress of the Peoples of the East (September 1920 / Shahrivar 1299 SH) in Baku reflected this shift.

From the second half of 1920 onward, the Comintern's Eastern Section and the Soviet People's Commissariat for Nationalities launched a broad research program on the specificities of Eastern societies. These studies examined social relations (class structure and social forces), as well as the political, economic, and in some cases cultural, structures of these societies. Research on China, India, Iran, and Turkey was prioritized, while Egypt received the largest share of analytical work. The Comintern needed answers concerning the relationship between pre-capitalist relations and the peasantry, the role of the commercial bourgeoisie, the political leanings of state bureaucrats, and the condition of the nascent and limited working classes. Understanding the roles of these social forces was crucial for tactical decisions.

Russian orientalists had studied Eastern societies since the nineteenth century, but this time the research acquired a more systematic form under the auspices of major Soviet state and political institutions. Its declared aim was to assist revolution in the East and uproot British imperialism there. In 1921 (1300 SH), a bulletin titled Colonial East began publication, carrying extensive articles on Eastern countries by researchers and theorists such as Mikhail Pavlovich, K. Troyanovsky, and Vladimir Gurko-Kryashin. The editor was Avetis Mikailian, known as Sultan-Zadeh—an Armenian communist from Maragheh in Iranian Azerbaijan. While studying commerce at the Moscow Institute of Economics (1912), he had joined the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, took an active part in the 1917 October Revolution, worked in the early economic institutions of the Soviet state, and in 1919–1920 played a key role in organizing the regional structures of the Iranian Edālat (Justice) Party in Turkestan. He co-founded

the Communist Party of Iran and convened its First Congress at Anzali in June 1920 (Tir 1299 SH). He served as one of the party's three delegates to the Second Comintern Congress, sat on its National and Colonial Commission, and was elected to the Executive Committee. Sultan-Zadeh's research on Eastern societies—especially Iran—dates from this period; his works The East and Revolution: Economy and National Questions in the Near and Far East and Modern Iran are products of these investigations.

Modern Iran is a book of about 100 pages. Sultan-Zadeh's preface bears the date 21 July 1922 (29 Tir 1301 SH). Written in Russian, it was translated into Persian at the time by a translator under the pseudonym T. N. It was published under the supervision of Mikhail Lazarevich Pavlovich by the Publishing House of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities and the All-Russia Oriental Studies Society (political-economic section). In the preface, Sultan-Zadeh states his purpose:

"The aim of the present text is to provide a concise description of the main aspects of life in Iran and draw readers' attention to current events. The sources required for this work were gathered during our recent trip to Iran (September–December 1921 / Shahrivar–Aban 1301 SH). Particular attention was paid to the agrarian question, which has hitherto received the least research. Beyond written sources, we conducted lengthy interviews with peasants in various regions of Iran, who candidly spoke of the unbearable conditions created by the unprecedented despotism of landlords. Unfortunately, because we had to leave Tehran in haste, we could not bring with us part of the Ministry of Finance's documents concerning the number of large estates subject to state taxation. Nevertheless, we believe this work can serve all who wish to become acquainted with the realities of life in Iran today. The limited scope prevented more detailed reflection; thus some issues were not addressed or only briefly noted. —Sultan-Zadeh, Moscow, 21 January 1921."

The preface indicates that the book rests on field research in villages and on official documents, with interviews conducted mainly in northern Iran—especially Azerbaijan—by Sultan-Zadeh and a CPI cadre named S. Avakian. At the time, Sultan-Zadeh was embroiled in intra-party struggles within the CPI. Two Central Committees existed; the first, led by him and recognized by the Comintern, conflicted with the policies of the Caucasus Bureau of the Russian Communist Party. His covert presence in Iran served both research purposes and the organization of his faction's supporters inside the country against rivals.

According to materials now available (published uncensored for the first time on the "Naqd-e Eqtesād-e Siāsī" website), Sultan-Zadeh was born 1268 SH in Maragheh to a poor Armenian family. His father was a carpenter and his mother a laundress; they separated early. He studied five years in Maragheh, but for lack of means his mother sent him, at age 13, to an Armenian church school near Yerevan. After finishing religious schooling, he joined the Caucasus labor movement and, in 1912, became a Bolshevik. In the Bolshevik questionnaire he described himself as "the child of a laundress and a professional revolutionary." He was in Petrograd during the October Revolution and took an active part. Choosing his father's name Sultan-Zadeh as his nom de guerre, he became known by it. He helped found the Edālat Party (1296 SH), recruited for the Red Army in Central Asia, played a leading role in organizing the First Congress of the Communist Party of Iran at Anzali (June 1920), led the party's left wing (opposed by the right wing around Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli), drafted the party line and First Congress documents, and was elected the party's First Secretary. He attended the Second Comintern Congress as a CPI delegate. In 1921 he

was appointed, as Lenin's advisor, head of the Near East section at the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.

Because of his Marxist erudition and capacity, he joined the Comintern Executive. Among Second Congress documents is "The Proletarian Revolution and the Communist International," which affirmed the Comintern as the world party of proletarian insurrection and the dictatorship of the proletariat; Sultan-Zadeh's signature appears alongside Lenin, Trotsky, Bordiga, Pankhurst, and others. In one of the most sensitive Congress debates—on the **national and** colonial question—the Iranian delegation, aligned with the Congress left, staked out its position. At the fifth session, Sultan-Zadeh stated:

"Let us suppose that a communist revolution begins in India. Can the workers of that country, without the aid of a revolutionary movement in England and Europe, withstand the onslaught of the bourgeoisie of the entire world? Naturally not. … The revolution that has begun in the West has prepared the ground in Iran and Turkey as well and has strengthened the revolutionaries. The era of world revolution has begun… The issue is to build and maintain a purely communist movement, as opposed to bourgeois-democratic movements. Any other appraisal of reality can lead to lamentable results."

A few months after the CPI's First Congress, a putsch-like maneuver removed 12 of the 15 elected CC members—including Sultan-Zadeh—from leadership. He had judged Iran's "national bourgeoisie" to be reactionary, arguing for immediately communist tactics aimed at the world revolution; this clashed with the political line of the Bolshevik organizations in the Caucasus and Azerbaijan, which viewed Reza Khan as progressive. The Comintern's ambiguities on the "national bourgeoisie" contributed to the strengthening of Reza Khan in Iran and of Atatürk in Turkey. In 1924, the Comintern even referred to Reza Khan as "the leader of the revolutionary-national movement of Iran, the man who succeeded in guaranteeing the independence of Iran."

Sultan-Zadeh vigorously opposed this Caucasus-Bolshevik policy, publishing critiques of its destructive effects on Iranian society and the proletarian class movement. Given his standing in the Bolshevik Party and the October Revolution, he was reinstated to party leadership in January 1922 and recognized again as the CPI's representative to the Comintern.

From 1299–1306 SH, Sultan-Zadeh played little direct role in steering the CPI—largely because the Comintern politely prevented his clandestine return to Iran and kept him occupied elsewhere. He devoted himself to Comintern and European party work, served as an economist for the USSR, helped found the Soviet Institute of Banking, and edited the Soviet Banking journal. He authored at least seven books (one recently translated into Persian) and played a notable role in translating Marxist works into Persian.

The Comintern's misguided policies toward the "national bourgeoisie"—specifically in Iran regarding Reza Khan (first as premier, later as monarch)—created serious obstacles to labor organization and struggles, fostering illusions that ultimately enabled widespread repression of communists. Legal return to Iran became impossible for Sultan-Zadeh; using a false passport, he slipped into Iran to attend a clandestine CC plenum. He even fooled the British (who controlled Iran's oil industry): they invited him, as a supposed Czechoslovak company representative, to tour

Abadan's oil installations—access beyond the reach of locals—which he later joked about with comrades.

At the Sixth Comintern Congress, Sultan-Zadeh engaged in fierce debate—from a communist standpoint—with Hilferding and Bukharin (Stalin's ally) over the nature of finance capital, revolutionary movements, and the role of the proletariat in colonial countries. The Stalin–Bukharin leadership omitted his proposals from the Congress draft.

After Reza Khan became Shah and would no longer tolerate communist activity, in 1307 SH he summoned the Soviet ambassador to protest CPI activities. Stalinist authorities then ordered a halt to any action against Reza Shah. Some speculate that communists' role in organizing labor protests—especially the famous southern oil-workers' strike—postponed, by a few years, the crackdown on those "Iranian" communists stuck in Russia who would not submit to Stalin.

From Azar 1310 SH, "de-Sultan-Zadeh-ization" accelerated. Stalin's supporters blamed him for all failures, accused him of replacing "collective leadership" with personal rule, and claimed he had blocked the growth of truly communist groups. From then, he was barred from publishing. In 1311 SH, Stalin's regime accused him of hostility to Lenin, and the CPI was dissolved. He continued criticizing Comintern policy. His political life thereafter is murky until his arrest; the exact date is unknown. On 25 Tir 1317 SH (July 1938), this major proletarian theorist was executed in Moscow by the "slayer of communists," on charges of "spying for Germany." A recent video shows a memorial plaque installed at his last address. The legacy of Stalinism cast this "red star," who had shone in proletarian politics, to the ground; yet he remained, to the end, an internationalist opponent of counter-revolution. To honor such figures is not merely to bow one's head, but to persist in the proletarian principles for which they fell, and to struggle against the barbaric social order they fought despite a short life.

Part Five – The Emergence of Left-Wing National-Liberation Movements in Iran

The anti-imperialist national-liberation movements in Gilan, Azerbaijan, and Khorasan surged after the October Revolution; a vast literature covers them. Here we note that with the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan on 28 April 1920 (8 Ordibehesht 1299 SH), the British occupation forces, under blows from the newly founded Red Army, retreated to Anzali (May 1920). The Gilan revolutionary movement intensified. The *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun-e Iran* were able to convene their congress there. After preparations in the province, twenty party militants arrived from Baku to Anzali in early June 1920 (mid-Khordad 1299 SH). The names of this 20-member delegation show that both the "Central Committee" formed in Baku and the seven-member committee elected at the Tashkent conference played decisive roles in organizing the First Congress of the Communist Party of Iran (*Ferqeh-ye Komunist-e Iran*).

On 1 Tir 1299 SH, the Edālat Party adopted the name Communist Party of Iran, and, on the same date in Anzali, its Founding Congress formally announced the party to the world.

Available documents and scholarship indicate that the formation of the Iranian working class—in the strict scientific sense (a class deprived of the means of production, compelled to sell labor-power as a commodity)—and Iran's first acquaintance with scientific socialism date to the transition from feudal (landlord–peasant) relations to capitalist (bourgeois) relations, i.e., the late 19th and early 20th centuries (late 13th century AH). The working class in Iran emerged and grew in struggle with a nascent bourgeoisie against two social forces: feudal despotism and mounting imperialist penetration. However, because Iran's bourgeoisie was malformed at birth and intrinsically broker-commercial in character, the number of workers at the party's founding was only about 130,000—roughly 1.5% of the country's population.

In the author's view, a basic weakness of the Iranian left—both earlier and up to 1979—was insufficient command of Marxian economics. Had the left digested the foundational concepts of *Capital*, it would have recognized that a society is capitalist to the extent that most surplus value is produced by wage-labor; otherwise, where pre-capitalist sectors (notably agriculture) still predominate, the principal contradiction cannot be capital vs. labor, and the revolutionary stage cannot yet be socialist. The Manifesto and *Capital* rest on the premise that when labor's share in surplus value grows to constitute the main body of GDP, the main contradiction becomes that between labor and capital, and wage-earners become the principal revolutionary force. A look at Iran's social structure and class composition at least until 1962 shows agriculture's share exceeding industry's—and thus the political preeminence of peasants over wage-earners. Hence theses such as "semi-feudal, semi-colonial" were, in two senses, untenable: first, Iran was not administered by foreign powers (its industries—including oil—were, in the main, run by Iranians); second, the notion of "semi-feudal" did not match economic reality after the Land Reform, whose roots lay in post-1953 land relations but which crystallized in those reforms.

As for scientific socialism in Iran, the first detailed discussion appeared in newspaper *Iran*, no. 402 (Esfand 1259 SH), quoting the progressive émigré newspaper Akhtar (Istanbul) on the ninth anniversary of the Paris Commune (18 March 1871). *Iran* explained its rationale: "The socialists … are advancing day by day in propagating their aims … for nearly twenty years now they have

spread across all of Europe." About a year and a half later, the Isfahan paper Farhang serialized, for the first time in Iran, Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Hosseini's *Treatise on Refuting the Naturalists (Neichariyyun)*. In the conditions of the time, this famous work by Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi played a broadly enlightening and progressive role; some researchers even consider him among the earliest heralds of socialism in Iran.

After the publication of Mirza Yusef Khan Mustashar al-Dowleh's *Yak Kalameh* (*One Word*)—Paris, 1287 AH—which, for the first time in Persian letters, elaborated constitutional law and its necessity for Iran (printed abroad and distributed in Iran at the cost of the author's ruin), Seyyed Jamal al-Din eleven years later openly broached in Iran the "types of government—whether republican, constitutional, or absolutist"—for which he too incurred Naser al-Din Shah's wrath and exile. Although these articles did not explicitly champion constitutional or republican government or demand the drafting of a constitution, the author insisted that government must be bound by law, that the treasury—"in truth the public purse of the people"—should be safeguarded, and that public revenues be spent "economically for public benefits such as building schools, digging qanats and roads, and establishing hospitals."

Iran's historical transition from feudal to capitalist relations had become irreversible. The nascent bourgeoisie—slowly yet steadily—was growing. Still, the current of revolutionary democracy had not yet separated from liberal democracy, the latter expressing the aims of patriotic, pragmatic circles near the ruling elite—figures such as Mirza Malkom Khan, Mustashar al-Dowleh, and others. That differentiation would come with the Constitutional Revolution. Iranian Islam opposed to imperial penetration—figures like Mirza Shirazi, Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi, Sheikh Ahmad Rouhi, Malek al-Motakallemin, Tabataba'i, and Behbahani—marched alongside them. From the Tobacco Protest onward, the anti-imperialist tenor dominated popular struggles.

Part Six – The Role of *Monavvar-ol-Fekr* and Intellectuals

From the mid-nineteenth century (after 1850), manifestations of Western civilization reached Iran chiefly via two routes, prompting some intellectuals and statesmen to advocate its adoption; Mehmet Ali Pasha's reforms in Egypt and Ottoman Tanzimat drew their attention. Thus, cities on Iran's periphery became staging posts for the transfer of ideas—Istanbul, Tbilisi, Baku, Cairo, Bombay, and Calcutta. In these cities, for political and economic reasons, communities of Iranian intellectuals and merchants lived and, alongside Turkish, Arab, and Tatar intellectuals, joined major cultural and political movements of the time. Among them, Istanbul held a special place—a center for religious reformers and quasi-laïc Iranian émigrés, including currents related to Shaikhi, Babi, and Azali circles. Many luminaries of Iran's constitutional era—Mirza Jahangir Khan Sur-e Esrafil, Malek al-Motakallemin, Mirza Habib Esfahani, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Sheikh Ahmad Rouhi, Haj Sayyah, Nazem al-Islam Kermani, and even itinerant Iranian dervishes—were connected to Azali networks and learned French in Istanbul.

As one of the most important stations of Iranian modernity, Istanbul mediated Iran's contact with the West across two phases:

1. The pre-constitutional modernity of the liberals (late 19th century), when Iranian émigrés encountered Tanzimat ideas and those fleeing Qajar despotism prepared the ground for Iran's Constitutional Revolution.
2. The constitutional modernity (early 20th century), when émigrés of the Lesser Despotism resonated with the Young Turks, demanding the effective establishment of constitutionalism and adoption of modern civilization. The printing presses and publishing houses of the constitutional era were, to a large extent, founded by Iranian modernists in Istanbul.

The first cohort of Iranian educated figures—such as Mirza Malkom Khan and Talebov—tended to support the government: they hailed from the ruling stratum and had advanced through state patronage. Under Amir Kabir, the split between reformers and conservatives at court widened, ultimately ending in the conservatives' victory.

One of the most influential figures for Iranian intellectual life was Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh (Akhundzov), a native of Tabriz residing in Russian Georgia. He wrote key works in Persian, notably Maktubāt-e Jalāl al-Dowleh—a fiery manifesto against Qajar-era traditions, calling for a renaissance in Iranian values and critiquing prevailing thought in light of European ideas.

In the late Naser al-Din Shah period, banned newspapers printed abroad and smuggled into Iran played a major role, especially the trio Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Mirza Malkom Khan, and ʿAbd-al-Rahim Talebov Tabrizi, who fashioned the literature of constitutionalism grounded in an Iranian renaissance and enlightenment. Of these, Aqa Khan Kermani, with his controversial Three Letters and other works critiquing Iranian history, sought to found an Iranian philosophy of history. Based in Istanbul, he wrote for avant-garde papers such as Qānun and Akhtar, drawing on Rousseau, Voltaire, and Spencer. Ultimately executed on Mozafar al-Din Shah's orders, he may be considered Iran's first executed intellectual. The Iranian left—crystallized in the Edālat Party and later the Communist Party—paid too little attention during the Constitutional era and under Reza

Shah to the clash of tradition and modernity (manifest in the secular–religious divide). This neglect persisted up to 1979, when, under the left's nose, clerical forces seized power. (A similar charge can be leveled at the Pahlavi state; but rather than defend that regime, our task is to examine our own costly errors to grasp the historical weaknesses of the left and avoid repeating them.)

During this period, intellectual circles organized secret societies and associations—such as Mirza Malkom Khan's Farāmushkhāneh (Freemasonic-style lodge), the Lodge of Iran's Awakening, the Society of Humanity, and the Society of Progress—disseminating ideas through pamphlets and newspapers. They called for land and administrative reforms, reducing clerical dominance, and legally constraining rulers. In the Constitutional era, intellectuals mostly advocated liberty and the rule of law rather than offering full social theory; political activists were likewise often practical leaders rather than theoreticians. Two broad groups played active roles:

1. Political activists—leaders and men of action for constitutionalism: Sattar Khan, Baqer Khan, Yeprem Khan (field commanders); Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli, Malek al-Motakallemin, Thiqeh al-Islam Tabrizi, Yahya Dowlat-Abadi, Seyyed Jamal Vaʿez Esfahani (orators and mobilizers).
2. Constitutionalist intellectuals—propagators, writers, pen-intellectuals: Founders of constitutional thought influenced by European Enlightenment ideas—e.g., Mirza Malkom Khan (pioneer of legalism, author of *Qānun*), Mirza Aqa Khan (pioneer of liberalism and religious critique), Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi (religio-political reformer), Talebov Tabrizi (advocate of progress and modernity; *Aḥvāl-e Talebof*), Mirza Jahangir Khan Sur-e Esrafil (courageous journalist against despotism), Dehkhoda (political satire *Charand-o-Parand*), Zeyn al-ʿAbedin Maraghehi / ʿAbdollah Behzādi (*Seyāhat-nāmeh-ye Ebrāhim Beg*, a critique of despotism), and Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh (political intellectual, critic of absolutism, advocate of Westernization).

Prominent left-leaning figures active in the Constitutional movement included Ali Mosio, Mirza Jahangir Khan Sur-e Esrafil, Malek al-Motakallemin, Talebov Tabrizi, Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli, Sattar Khan, Baqer Khan, Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh, Mirza Malkom Khan, Mirza Aqa Khan, Hasan Taqizadeh, and Azali circles. Here I have deliberately used the term "left"—not necessarily meaning Marxist or communist—to mirror usage in the French Revolution: those advocating fundamental, radical change and seeking to surpass the existing order.

Part Seven – Major Political Currents on the Eve of the Constitutional Revolution

Based on accounts of the Constitutional Movement, three major left currents were active on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution:

1. **Revolutionary Social Democracy – *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun***
2. **The Edālat (Justice) Party**
3. **The Communist Party of Iran**

Iranian Revolutionary Social Democracy (*Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun*) emerged from its earliest embryonic stages in connection with proletarian internationalism. Its initial activists were largely compatriot Armenians and, in some cases, Caucasus-born Iranians who later founded the Edālat Party (1296 SH) and, three years afterward (1299 SH), the Communist Party of Iran. Without doubt, they played an active role in preparing and conducting the Constitutional Revolution (1284–1290 SH). These militants, who consistently fought in the front ranks of the revolution, fulfilled their historical role along two main pathways:

1. by striving to organize a revolutionary party grounded in the theoretical principles of scientific socialism and in organizational ties to proletarian internationalism;
2. by helping gather and organize workers into trade-union bodies, industrial associations, and the labor movement.

From the late 19th to the early 20th century (coinciding with the late 1280s to early 1290s AH), the center of revolutionary Social Democracy shifted from Western Europe to Russia. In March 1896 (Farvardin 1275 SH) the First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party proclaimed the party's formation. After the congress, however, the party's Central Committee was arrested. Broad efforts to build an all-Russian party began in exile with the publication of Lenin's newspaper Iskra (The Spark) on 11 December 1900 (Azar 1279 SH). One Iskra article shows special attention to Iranian toilers who, alongside other nationalities' workers, labored in the oil industries of the Tsarist South, especially Azerbaijan.

Existing documents show that revolutionaries inside Iran helped route Iskra and other socialist publications from Western Europe to Russia along the line Berlin → Vienna → Tabriz → Baku. This important revolutionary operation took place under the supervision of Lenin and his wife Krupskaya. As seen in correspondence between Iskra representatives and other activists of the Russian Social-Democratic movement in Western Europe, Iran—especially Tabriz—was already a key relay point. Revolutionary publications traveled from Munich to Vienna and then to Tabriz.

Sources and research indicate that Iranian revolutionaries and social democrats—such as Asadollah Ghafarzadeh and others—worked hard to establish such connections.

Since many Iranian workers had migrated to Baku and the Caucasus for employment, the Himmat group was founded in Baku in 1283 SH to organize revolutionary social-democratic activity among Azerbaijani and Iranian working people. It was this group that first rendered the term "Social

Democrat" as "*Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun*" so it would be more familiar and intelligible to common folk and laborers unfamiliar with European languages.

In 1283 SH, Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli—whose birthplace is contested (some considered him a Caucasus fighter from Russia who had come to organize the communist movement in Iran; Kasravi and others, with documentation, viewed him as born in Salmas/Orumiyeh and raised in the Caucasus)—returned from Russia and, together with a number of workers and like-minded comrades in Mashhad, formed the first cells of Iran's revolutionary Social Democracy. The following year (1284 SH), on the threshold of the Constitutional Revolution, at a meeting in Mashhad, the first official document of the social-democratic movement in Iran—a by-law, whose text has been published—was drafted and approved.

Historical inquiry shows that in the summer of 1905 (1284 SH) a group of 28 Armenians of Tabriz with Marxist leanings gathered to play an influential role in the struggles of certain classes and strata against monarchical despotism and its powerful foreign patron, Tsarist Russia. This group is known in the historical record as the Tabriz Social-Democratic Group. Its members, Armenians of Tabriz and intellectuals connected to the world beyond Iran, had been influenced by the labor and social-democratic movement of the Caucasus. Under the prevailing conditions, the group arrived at two different analyses of society and adopted two different tactics:

- The first current held that Iran had entered the capitalist stage; industrial production had emerged alongside large handicraft workshops; peasants and small artisans were being transformed into proletarians, and this process was spreading. Therefore, the group's task was socialist organization of workers. Its noted theoreticians were Arshavir Chelengirian and Vasa Khachatourian.
- The second current believed Iran had only recently set out on the path of capitalism and had not entered the industrial stage; the struggle therefore had to take a democratic form aligned with constitutionalist demands. Its theoreticians were Sedrak Avakian and Veram Pilossian.

From the first current, Arshavir Chelengirian, after corresponding with prominent leaders of the Second International (including Kautsky), wrote an analytical article on Iranian society published in Die Neue Zeit, organ of the German Social-Democratic Party, on 20 May 1910. Entitled "The Economic and Social Roots of the Iranian Revolution," it had been drafted in November 1909 (seven months earlier). Chelengirian—an Armenian of Tabriz and an employee of the Imperial Bank of Persia in that city—was an intellectual and theoretician.

The Formation of Social Democracy in Iran

Available documents confirm the view—shared by the vast majority of Iranian writers and foreign orientalists—that 1283–1284 SH marked the beginning of the historical process of revolutionary Social Democracy's formation in Iran and the emergence of the first Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun organizations.

From Azar 1284 SH onward, following the creation of the first cells and organizations of the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun and the drafting of their first by-laws, street demonstrations and sit-ins

(bast-nishini) in sacred places gradually began. As the constitutionalist movement spread across major Iranian cities and after clashes with state forces, Mozaffar al-Din Shah, under public pressure, in Tir 1285 SH issued the decree to draft a constitution, and in Shahrivar ordered elections for the First National Consultative Assembly. The First Majles drafted Iran's first constitution in Mehr, and after royal sanction in Azar 1285 SH, it was ratified.

Counter-revolutionary riots and uprisings in Dey and Bahman of the same year were crushed in Tehran, Tabriz, Rasht, Isfahan, Mashhad, and elsewhere by revolutionary forces—especially the Society of Mujahidin, whose core was formed by the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun and which in fact served as the party's mass organization and armed force, decisive in determining the revolution's fate.

During this period—parallel to the labor movement in Russia—the Iranian working class, for the first time in the country's history, began forming its trade unions. What is certain is that the immediate preparatory period of the Constitutional Revolution also coincided with the formation of the labor movement and the preparation of the first labor unions in Iran.

Thus a strike movement gradually took shape. In the course of the revolution's preparation, for the first time in Azar 1284 SH, printing-house workers in Tehran formed their union. In early Dey 1285 SH, Tehran tramway workers and employees, following their union's orders, stopped work in protest at the dismissal of several colleagues. The strike lasted twelve days and ended in victory; the Ministry of Public Works was forced to take steps to improve the workers' economic situation.

From the start, the labor movement grew with the direct assistance and active participation of Iran's social democrats. The Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun took part not only in unions of workers in productive and service establishments but also in all guild associations of bazaar sellers, government employees' associations, and more. At the same time, it should be noted that in associations such as the Guilds' Association, owners of craft workshops and small- and medium-scale handicraft industries also took part—an outcome of the quantitative and qualitative weakness of the working class and a hallmark of the early phase of the labor and trade-union movement.

Regarding the activities of the "Markaz-e Gheybi" (Invisible Center)—formed by *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun* activists and fighters in Tabriz such as Ali Mosio, Haji Ali-ye Davaforush, Haji Rasoul Sadeghiyāni, and others—many Constitutional histories have spoken. Through the efforts of this group and their links with Himmat, the RSDLP program was translated into Persian, followed by the drafting of the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun party program.

The newspaper *Faryād* (Urmia, 19 Khordad 1286 SH) published an article "Addressed to All Leaders of the Factions (Mujahidin)" which, after underscoring the importance of the "Mujahid" in Iran—especially in Azerbaijan—highlighted two very important tasks: "to draft a correct program and a correct statute." Three months later (19 Shahrivar 1286 SH), such a program and statute were approved at the Mujahidin Conference in Mashhad (its text printed in *Donya*, 1341 SH, no. 4).

After eleven months of valiant defense of Tabriz against the court's reaction and with the Mujahidin social democrats advancing from Gilan and then Isfahan to Tehran, Mohammad Ali

Mirza suffered a humiliating defeat and constitutionalism was restored; the Second Majles convened. At this time, other parties—Ittihad va Taraqqi (Union and Progress), Eʿtedaliyun (Moderates), etc.—came into being. Among these, the only party representing consistent democracy and supporting the revolutionary movement was the Democratic Party, formed and launched through the endeavor and direct cooperation of the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun. Its organ, the newspaper Iran-e Now (first issue 7 Shahrivar 1288 SH / August 1909), played an influential role in promoting Marxism–Leninism in Iran.

Across dozens of articles, Iran-e Now quoted Marx and Engels at length. To indicate the writers' grasp of Marxist-Leninist learning, two brief examples suffice. In a series titled "Terror," criticizing and rejecting this phenomenon, the paper distinguished subjectivism from objectivism in understanding historical problems and, drawing on historical materialism, argued that killing individuals cannot fundamentally alter socio-economic processes.

A crucial point: in 1288/1909, revolutionaries condemned terror. Yet sixty years later, Iranian militants—Fadāʾiyān and Mojahedin, both religious and Marxist wings—turned to assassinations, failing to grasp that capitalism is a social relation embedded in a coherent administrative–political–economic system; it is not "guarded" by particular persons but by the system itself. Thus the killing of this or that capitalist or repressive agent does not overturn the system—though under certain objective revolutionary conditions, terror may intensify the process.

It was also in 1278–1279 SH that Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a prominent Russian revolutionary, arrived in Iran at the head of a group of Bolsheviks (Lenin's followers) who later actively participated in the Constitutional Revolution and aided Iranians. In Rasht, they established internationalist clubs, traveled to Azerbaijan—there exists a photograph of Ordzhonikidze with Sattar Khan—and provided substantial organizational and propaganda assistance to the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun. After Ordzhonikidze's departure, one of the party's Mujahidin, Bāghi Jaʿfari, continued his efforts, collecting funds to send to Paris to support the publication of socialist press.

Letters from Armenian *Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun* in Tabriz during 1278–1288 SH to Karl Kautsky, and some to Plekhanov (published in the Tudeh Party archives), show that serious debates already existed within Iran's Social Democratic Party. A left group led by Avetis (Otis) Sultan-Zadeh argued that since the Constitutional Revolution was the bourgeois revolution of Iran aiming to advance capitalism, the working class should not participate or support the bourgeoisie and its revolution. Interestingly, even figures like Kautsky, not well-informed about Iran, did not accept this position as a general rule. The "left" were not persuaded by Kautsky's reply and wrote again to Plekhanov (whose answer is not extant; Kautsky's was published at the time in Buria of Tiflis and Akho of Baku). From the left's letter—by their own description, "a small group of young intellectuals"—it is evident they had very limited information about Iran's social structure, classes, and conditions, as well as about the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun party itself.

Part Eight – The Rise and Fall of the Constitutional Movement

After the Constitutional Decree was signed, the Majles passed, on 14 Mehr 1286 SH, a Supplement to the Constitution in 107 articles to remedy deficiencies in the basic law and submitted it for ratification and implementation by Mohammad Ali Shah. The Shah refused to sign, citing Article 8, which stated that "all inhabitants of Iran are equal before the state law," and, considering himself the nation's leader, declined. At his request, the Majles was shelled by Colonel Liakhov, commander of the Russian Cossack Brigade. Ironically, this same Supplement undermined the foundation of the Constitutional Revolution, for Article 1 declared: "The official religion of Iran is Islam, of the true Jaʿfari (Shiʿi) creed," and Article 2 stipulated that "five first-rank mujtahids shall supervise the Majles's enactments so that no law contrary to the shariʿa is approved**."

It is now clear that, due to the left's failure to strive for unity with liberals within the Constitutional Revolution, a Supplement was passed that later served against both camps. Shortly after the revolution, the two socio-political and intellectual currents—revolutionary democracy (close to the popular masses) and liberalism (close to ruling circles)—which had cooperated during the preparatory phase, gradually split. The liberals, who—due to the weakness of the nascent bourgeoisie—had managed to occupy positions of power, slid into reaction: the killing of Sattar Khan, the people's heroic leader of the Constitutional Revolution, was a glaring sign of liberalism's betrayal of the revolution and the people. They compromised with British imperialism and Tsarist Russia, yielded to their ultimata, and dissolved the Second Majles themselves.

Thus the Supplement—passed by the victorious revolutionaries—marked the formal beginning of the Constitutional Movement's defeat.

After the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun were crushed, even the Democrats who persisted in revolutionary positions—represented by the Democratic Party—were dispersed, many forced into exile. The three conquerors of Tehran were Sardar Asʿad-e Bakhtiari (despite his liberal, anti-despotic stance, his class origin was feudal), Sepah-salār-e Tankāboni (a landowner, governor of Gilan and Qazvin), and Samsam al-Saltaneh, Sardar Asʿad's brother (also from the Bakhtiari khans). "Read the long tale yourself about the end of constitutionalism!" These signs and documents show that a revolution whose victorious leaders were great landowners could not have been anti-feudal or seeking agrarian reform; rather, its essence lay in the rule of law and curbing the monarch's power.

Yet the people's struggle and the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun's activity did not cease. During World War I (1914–1918)—when Iran, despite neutrality, was effectively occupied by the Central Powers and the Allies—the struggle of the toiling masses, with the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun in the front ranks at home and in exile, continued.

Amid heightened reactionary provocations, some Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun activists who had left Iran carried out broad political work in Western Europe with the support of the RSDLP and leaders like Lenin, exposing reaction in Iran and imperialist meddling in its internal affairs. The RSDLP's central organ, Sotsial-Demokrat (14 September 1911 / Shahrivar 1290 SH), printed the appeal of the Central Committee of Iran's Social-Democratic Party. The original, written to protest Mohammad Ali Mirza's return from Russia to Iran and to denounce Tsarist and British intrigues, had appeared in the last issues of Iran-e Now (Mordad 1290 SH / 16 August 1911).

International solidarity and proletarian-internationalist ties of the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun were never severed. Shortly after Ordzhonikidze left Iran, another Georgian revolutionary named Tria (often mistakenly written Soraya in historical writings), who had lost a finger in the trenches of the Azerbaijani revolution, went to Western Europe. With the aid of Russian social democrats and Lenin, he organized conferences in European cities on Iran's situation and the Ejtemāʿiyun-ʿĀmiyun's activities—often ending with resolutions supporting Iran's revolution and condemning imperialist interventions. This was the darkest period of British and Russian interference in Iran. In the same period, Avetis (Otis) Sultan-Zadeh, a CPI leader, voiced his criticisms of Lenin's theses on colonial societies and the role of the national bourgeoisie. Sultan-Zadeh wrote The Development of Capitalism in Iran at a time when, based on documentation, the total number of wage-earners in the country was about 140,000—less than one percent of the population!

The fundamental problem of the Communist Party in this period was the absence of a minimum (short-term) program—that is, a tactical program. For example, apart from the evident stance that "Reza Shah must be overthrown," it is unclear what the CPI demanded of his government—this, even though for at least the first decade he had drawn large parts of society behind him and advanced portions of his authoritarian modernizing agenda (establishing a judiciary, founding a university, etc.). The CPI's heirs in the guerrilla movement later followed the same logic: both guerrilla currents—Fadāʾiyān and Mojahedin—pursued no specific program beyond overthrowing the Shah.

Yet Marx and Engels stated plainly in the Communist Manifesto:

"Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims and interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement... In France, they ally with the Social-Democrats against the conservative and radical bourgeoisie... In Switzerland, they support the Radicals... Among the Poles, they support the party that insists upon an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation... In Germany, the Communist Party fights with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against absolute monarchy, feudal squirearchy, and petty bourgeoisie."

By contrast, the Iranian left, beyond the call for overthrow, sought no alliances with any person or group, let alone tactical engagements with the Pahlavi regime—whether during the 15 Khordad 1342 crisis or in support of the December 1977 statement by the three leaders of the National Front.

This reflects a poverty of political vision among militants: in any struggle, alongside long-term aims, one must articulate short-term demands and tactical slogans as well.

Part Nine – The Confusion of the Left and the Comintern Regarding the National Bourgeoisie in the Third World

With the formation of the Communist Party, the era of Leninism was founded on the slogan of *"proletarian internationalism and the struggle against imperialism."* However, this gradually drifted away from its original meaning and turned into the theory of *"global confrontation against imperialism."* In practice, workers were discouraged from national struggles so that everything would be sacrificed to the "Big Brother." Yet Marx had believed that the proletarian struggle for the conquest of political power was essentially a national struggle. Obviously, if workers cannot seize power in their own country, they will not be able to assist the world proletariat. Thus, first, they must constitute themselves as the leading class of the nation, in other words, transform themselves into a nation—at least temporarily remaining national in this stage.

Unfortunately, from the 1920s onward, the Soviet Communist Party subordinated global defenders of socialism to its own policies and interests, tying the national demands of other countries to the global strategy of the USSR. Leftist parties around the world followed this line. From then on, defenders of socialism read Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* more than Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*. This deviation, coupled with the misguidance of the Soviet Communist Party, pushed international socialism astray, polarized the world, and caused leftist parties and groups to think more of the interests of the Soviet Union—or later China—than of their own nations, focusing on the struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

Yet in many countries, including Iran, supporting (or at least cooperating with) the nascent national industrial bourgeoisie was necessary for the growth of industry, social progress, and development. In other words, instead of following Marx's thesis about the necessity of capitalist development before socialism—an essential step for the growth and consciousness of the working class—Marxists aimed to destroy capitalism outright. A glance at the slogans and demands of leftist movements in Iran before the 1979 Revolution reveals this bitter truth. The damages that arose in the Russian Revolution from abandoning Marx's thesis about capitalist development before socialism spread to other countries as well.

It is noteworthy that Avetis Sultan-Zadeh, despite his leftist radicalism in explaining the stage of revolution and the role of the national bourgeoisie, opposed blind obedience to the Soviet Communist Party and the Comintern—"whatever they say is correct." He always maintained his independent judgment, unlike many of his comrades. This independence was the very reason he was executed by Stalin.

Among the first generation of Iranian communists connected to Lenin, Avetis Sultan-Zadeh stands out. At 18, he joined the Social Democratic movement of the Caucasus, and in 1913 became a member of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. As one of the founders of the Iranian Communist group, in 1917 he joined the "Edalat Party of Iran." This party can be considered the first organized leftist formation in Iran, heavily influenced by the Russian Bolsheviks. Its founders were mostly ethnic Azeris of Iranian origin who had gone to the Caucasus for work and cooperated with the Bolsheviks.

After the October Revolution, Sultan-Zadeh worked under Lenin as deputy in the confiscation of landlords' and capitalists' properties. In 1920, he represented the Communist Party of Iran at the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) and joined its Executive Committee. At Lenin's suggestion, he was tasked with preparing a plan on social revolution in Eastern countries. Lenin, who considered Iran the gateway for revolutionary communism to the East, asked him to present documented critiques and analyses of Iran's economic and political conditions.

In 1921, Sultan-Zadeh was appointed head of the Near East Department in the Soviet Foreign Commissariat as Lenin's advisor. Yet his closeness to Lenin did not save him from Stalin's purges. In 1932, he was accused of "deviation and opposition to Lenin," and on July 16, 1938, executed on charges of "espionage for Germany." During Khrushchev's de-Stalinization period, his honor was restored along with that of many other Iranian communists executed under Stalin.

Although the past century shows no Iranian Marxist leftist reached such prominence with Lenin, the Comintern, and the Bolshevik Party, Stalin's loyal Tudeh Party cadres—and even other Iranian Marxist leftists before the Revolution—failed to present a clear picture of him to the movement. Fortunately, after the Revolution, and particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, thanks to the late Khosrow Shakib and others, a clear and comprehensive account of him (and figures such as Ghafarzadeh and Pishevari) was presented. The cover photo of this book is also dedicated to his memory. Yet the physical and intellectual silencing of dissent—a legacy of totalitarian power—still extends to today in the Iranian left, much of which inherits the Tudeh Party's submissive traditions toward the "Big Brother."

We should recall that even today, some pro-Russian leftists portray Trotsky—the commander of the Red Army—simply as a CIA agent, merely because of his opposition to Stalin and his theory of global revolution.

Although the Communist Party had indirect involvement in almost all popular associations formed after the Constitutional Revolution—especially from the 1920s onward—and often created organized factions within them, these groups were gradually dissolved by the reactionary ruling system due to their lack of strong social base and popular influence. Nonetheless, they left deep effects on society. Many of these cultural societies, created under the revolutionary spirit of the time, were utilized by the Party. Many of their members, filled with love for freedom, saw joining the Communist Party of Iran as the path to fulfilling their aspirations.

However, the Party's main efforts were within political associations rather than among the masses of workers and peasants. This shows that the Party sought to capture the fortress through the gatekeepers rather than entering through the people themselves—a mindset that later reappeared in the Tudeh Party, especially after the 1953 coup. This approach stemmed from the Soviet Communist Party's strategy of seizing power by infiltrating state apparatuses rather than mobilizing the masses in Third World countries.

After the split and the formation of the "Ejtemaiyun" Party, it became one of the centers of activity. The Communist Party of Iran organized a strong faction within it and had significant influence on its political strategies. For the second congress of Ejtemaiyun, many delegates from

Tehran, Tabriz, Rasht, Qazvin, Mashhad, and other cities were chosen from the Communist Party. Had this congress convened, the Communist Party would have played a major role.

By making effective use of available opportunities, the Communist Party of Iran managed to create a nationwide organization with branches in Tehran, Gilan, Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Isfahan, Qazvin, and Kermanshah. Central representatives were dispatched to many other cities to establish organizations. Yet the Achilles' heel of the Iranian Communist Party was the absence of representatives from the oil industry workers—the true proletarian base of Iran.

With the victory of the Constitutionalists and the relative freedom in the press, Iranian intellectuals gained their social and political standing, immediately clashing with the clergy and the court—the two pillars of Iranian power. Among the most significant intellectual journalists were Jahangir Khan Sur-e Esrafil and Ali Akbar Dehkhoda. Sur-e Esrafil was executed during the Minor Tyranny and became a symbol of intellectual resistance. Another influential political figure was Aliqoli Khan Sardar Asad Bakhtiari, one of the three conquerors of Tehran during the Constitutional Revolution, who became Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief.

After the Constitutional Revolution, intellectuals were referred to by the French word *intellectuel* or the Arabic *monavvar-ol-fekr*; later, the Persian terms *roshanfekr* (intellectual) and *roshandish* (enlightened) became common. At that time, Iranian intellectuals looked mainly toward France, which, unlike Britain, had no direct colonial role in Iran and was also Britain's rival. Even Naser al-Din Shah had insisted that Dar al-Fonun be run by the French rather than the English. This made France a center of education and residence for Iranians. From then until the second Pahlavi era, knowledge of French was essential for the educated Iranian elite, and French replaced Arabic as the scholarly language of intellectuals. Most Western works of literature, philosophy, and history were translated into Persian through French.

Nevertheless, the influence of English thought and culture cannot be ignored, especially since, with Iran's monarchical system, the British constitutional monarchy—where the king was symbolic and uninvolved in politics—was often an intellectual model, even for anti-British figures such as Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh. The United States also played a role as a "third force" between Russian and British colonial rivalry in Iran. Until 1953, America was respected by many intellectuals—except the Tudeh Party members. Conversely, Tsarist Russia was considered the intellectuals' main enemy. But after the Bolsheviks took power, Lenin's annulment of Russia's colonial treaties with Iran, and Soviet opposition to the reactionary 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement, leftist intellectuals developed respect for the USSR.

After the 1917 Revolution, Lenin emphasized, in line with the resolutions of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, that: *"The Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party protests against the robber policy of the Tsarist clique, which seeks to strangle the freedom of the Iranian people and spares no savage or vile act in doing so. The Conference declares that the alliance of the Russian and British governments—promoted by Russian liberals—is directed above all against the democratic movements of Asia, turning the liberal English government into an accomplice of the Tsarist regime's bloody crimes. The Conference declares its full solidarity with the struggle of the Iranian people, especially with the Iranian Social Democrats (Ejtemaiyun-e Amiyun), who have suffered heavy losses in fighting the Tsarist oppressors."*

In a proclamation to the Muslims of Russia and the East, Lenin declared: *"... We proclaim that the secret treaty for the partition of Iran has been annulled. As soon as military operations end, Russian troops will withdraw from Iran, and the right of the Iranian people to determine their destiny will be guaranteed."* These positions enhanced Lenin's stature among nationalists of the time. Even national writers such as Sadeq Hedayat, the author of *The Blind Owl*, often mingled with leftist circles.

Among the most important figures of Iranian intellectual life after the Constitutional Revolution were Seyed Hassan Taqizadeh, Mohammad Ali Tarbiat, Allameh Qazvini, Mirzadeh Eshghi, Malek al-Shoara Bahar, Ebrahim Pourdavoud, Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, and Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranshahr. Many of them worked in journalism and collaborated in journals such as *Iranshahr* and *Kaveh*. Other intellectuals—such as Hassan Pirnia, Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Abdolhossein Teymourtash, Ahmad Kasravi, Farrokhi Yazdi, Arbab Keikhosrow Shahrokh, Seyed Ziaeddin Tabatabaei, Iraj Mirza, and Aref Qazvini—were also prominent in the political and cultural life of the era, playing significant roles in Iran's social and political transformations, including the rise of Reza Shah.

Part Ten – Traits of Intellectuals During the Constitutional Era and the Pahlavi Period

Among the most important characteristics of the first generation of intellectuals (the Constitutional era) were four features:

1. A conflicted view of the West—neither wholly positive nor wholly negative. They praised Western intellectual and scientific achievements, especially in political structure and governance (popular sovereignty), yet attacked Western imperial powers' foreign policies (e.g., the 1919 Agreement). Poets like Mirzadeh ʿEshqi, ʿĀref Qazvini, Malek-al-Shoʿarā Bahār, Farrokhi Yazdi, and Iraj Mirza fiercely criticized Britain—their sharpest barbs aimed chiefly at Britain and Russia, less so at other Western states (e.g., America).
2. Defense of women's freedom and gender equality, and criticism of customs and traditions that curtailed women's social presence. Intellectual poets (ʿEshqi, Bahār, ʿĀref, Iraj) wrote against veiling, viewing it as a prime obstacle to women's participation. This second feature, after the 1953 coup, largely dropped from the Iranian left's agenda—consciously or not—up to 1979. Indeed, the left shaped by "Abu-Dharr-style socialism" even boycotted the first women's demonstrations after the revolution—which rightly protested backwardness and compulsory veiling.
3. Critique of religion and religious institutions by figures like Akhundzadeh, Malkom Khan, Hasan Roshdieh, ʿAbd-al-Rahim Talebof, Malek-al-Motakallemin, Jahangir Khan Sur-e Esrafil, ʿAli-Akbar Dehkhoda, and Sheikh Hadi Najm-Abadi. They condemned religion's entanglement with superstition and the rigidity and bigotry of some clerics. Later generations—especially after the coup—lost this boldness, and, under the banner of unity with the "revolutionary petty-bourgeois religious" (the Mojahedin), some forgot that a duty of the left is to demystify and de-sacralize—even claiming, in some cases, to be Marxists who arrived via Imam Hossein.
4. Critique of society and the people—perhaps a constant of Iranian intellectual life—targeting those customs and mores that caused backwardness and blocked a faster approach to modernity (e.g., the subordination of women). A major shortcoming of Iran's Marxist left was insufficient attention to social psychology and sociology of the Iranian people. A populist reading—"whatever the people do is right"—kept the left from grasping Iranian social habits, attributing everything to superstructure and capitalism. Later memoirs of foreigners in Iran and works like Mohammad-ʿAli Jamalzadeh's essays on Iranian mores, Hassan Naraghi's *Our Sociology*, and Dr. Izadi's *Why We Are Backward* highlighted how centuries of foreign incursions fostered traits like dissimulation, vacillation, and fickleness—not reducible to capitalism—and how such traits affected arrests at Siahkal, street clashes, and even the 1980s.

The opening created by the Constitutional Decree (Mordad 1285 SH) for intellectual activity was snuffed out after Reza Khan consolidated power. As premier and then monarch, he restricted or eliminated some first-generation intellectuals—though others were offered space. Mirzadeh ʿEshqi was assassinated at home on 12 Tir 1303 SH by order of the chief of police; Farrokhi Yazdi was murdered in Qasr Prison on 18 Mehr 1318 SH by Dr. Ahmadi with an air injection. Others—Bahār, ʿĀref—were imprisoned, exiled, or confined.

Second-Generation Intellectuals (Pahlavi I)

With Reza Shah's accession, the first phase ended and a second generation emerged—figures such as Iraj Mirza, Mirzadeh ʿEshqi, Mohammad-ʿAli Jamalzadeh, Sadeq Hedayat, ʿAli-Akbar Dāvar, Farrokhi Yazdi, Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, Ahmad Kasravi, Reza Hedayati (Forughi), ʿAli Dashti, and Mohammad-Taqi Bahār. Modeling on the West, they sought to apply new concepts in Iran. Cultural and social homogenization gained popularity—mirroring Western currents. They founded modern institutions like schools and universities. More than simply "Westernizers," they stressed Iran's cultural and historical capacities. Given a prevailing mono-cultural vision, non-Persian cultures suffered heightened suppression. Ideals like the "Great Civilization" and millennial identity flourished. Some, like Iraj Mirza, attacked religion and the religious masses; others, like ʿEshqi and Bahār, focused their sharpest critiques on clerical custodians rather than the religious institution itself. The boldness of this generation was seldom matched later—especially under Mohammad-Reza Shah and among guerrilla-era intellectuals, who often appeased even reactionary religious forces.

Third-Generation Intellectuals (Pahlavi II)

From late Pahlavi I, left intellectual life took root; Taqi Arani and Iraj Eskandari were among its founders. Figures such as Morteza Keyvan, Nima Yushij, Mohammad Qazvini, Seyyed Mohammad-ʿAli Jamalzadeh, Khalil Maleki, Mostafa Shoaʿian, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Shahrokh Meskoub, Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, Ebrahim Golestan, Ahmad Shamlou, Fereydun Adamiyat, Homa Nateq, Amir-Hossein Aryanpour, Sammad Behrangi, Gholam-Hossein Saʿedi, Dr. Ali Shariati, ʿAbdolhossein Nushin, Badiʿ al-Zaman Foruzanfar, Dehkhoda, Parvin Etesami, Parvin Dolatabadi, Simin Daneshvar, Simin Behbahani, and Forough Farrokhzad belong to this current.

A key point: Mohammad-Reza Shah, though unlike his father educated and Western-trained, disliked intellectuals; as Asadollah Alam's memoirs show, he derisively called them "roshan-an-fekr" ("bright-about-thinking"). This antipathy was mutual: Iran's intellectual milieu, traumatized by the 1953 coup, long refused to acknowledge even the useful reforms of his reign.

With the expansion of universities and schools, and larger student cohorts sent to Europe under Pahlavi I, Iranians met Western thought more rapidly, paving the way for a third generation of intellectuals that flourished under Pahlavi II. After Reza Shah's abdication and Kasravi's assassination, clerical and religious viewpoints gained ground over secular intellectual ones; with the Oil Nationalization Movement and later repression and the closing of political space, secular intellectual life was sharply curtailed (e.g., Hamid Enayat, Parviz Nātel Khanlari, Seyyed Fakhr al-Din Shādman).

During the Cold War, intellectual life worldwide—including in Iran—was strongly shaped by bloc politics. In countries aligned with the West, such as Iran, the space for left intellectuals was closed, feeding suspicion toward those allowed to operate inside.

In 1307 SH (1928), the Majles required the state to send 100 students abroad annually for higher education. The first cohort in 1307—110 students to France—included future luminaries: Mehdi Bazargan, Ali Shayegan, Mehdi Āzar, Karim Sanjabi, Ahmad Rezavi Kermani, Mohammad-ʿAli

Maleki Yazdi, Reza Radmanesh, Khalil Maleki, Lotf-ʿAli Suratgar, Gholam-ʿAli Fariour, ʿAbd-al-Hamid Zangeneh, and ʿAbdollah Riazi. The program paused during World War II, then resumed. Many of these students became modernizers of the age—one might say Europe-goers carried European Social Democracy to Iran, while migrant workers to the Caucasus and Baku carried a Russian Social-Democratic current—from the Constitutional era onward.

Part Eleven – The Communist Party's Re-Emergence

In Iran, trade unions developed with CPI support, and Iranian unions joined the Profintern (Red International of Labor Unions). The Party founded a youth organization, later admitted to the Young Communist International. After the First Congress of the CPI, Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli succeeded Sultan-Zadeh and, in Dey 1300 SH, had the Central Committee adopt a program titled "Theses on Iran's Socio-Economic Situation and the CPI's Tactics Toward It" (drafted in early 1299 SH, before the congress). These theses described Iran as transitioning from pre-capitalist systems to capitalism, and the stage of revolution as democratic.

Central Committee members in this period included Avetis Sultan-Zadeh, Jafar Javadzadeh, Kamran Aghazadeh, Baterbek L. Abukov, Matilda Bola, Seyyed-Qoli Haddadzadeh, Neʿmat Basir, Mohammad-Qoli Alikhanov, Haydar ʿAmu-Oghli (Sultan-Zadeh), Asadollah Ghafarzadeh, and likely ʿAbd-al-Samad Kambakhsh, the Party's then-unknown figure.

Reza Khan, seeing the CPI's growing activity as a potential threat to himself and to the dictatorship he was building, moved against the communists once he had consolidated somewhat. Days before the Qajar dynasty's abolition, the Party's last newspaper, Naṣihat, was shut down; its director Vaʿeẓ Keyvāni was summoned to Tehran and killed on the night of 9 Ābān in front of the Majles. From then, the police launched their first broad assault on CPI structures; communists lived under constant surveillance in the Reza-Shahi era. The Party tightened its operations and deepened clandestinity. Internally, a crisis also broke out. From the start of nationwide activity, the Party debated its stance toward Reza Khan. To a large majority, he appeared as a man of the people, patriotic and anti-imperialist. The party press reflected a line of support combined with criticism: Reza Khan had curbed Seyyed Ziaʾ al-Din—seen as a British agent—strengthened the central government, and, at least initially, had not blocked progressive forces, even the CPI.

On 3 Khordad 1299 SH (May 1920), the First Conference of the Edālat Party met in Bandar-e Anzali, amid the British withdrawal and Red Army presence. Forty-eight delegates attended; Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli delivered the political report, though no organizational decisions were taken. In late Khordad / early Tir 1299 SH (1920), the Edālat Party Congress opened at Anzali under the honorary presidency of V. I. Lenin and Nariman Narimanov. At the time, the southern oil industry employed a considerable number of workers—likely over 15,000; tens of thousands of Iranians also worked in the Caucasus, especially in Baku's oil industry. Many returned home as Iran's social movement grew. These factors favored the founding of the Communist Party of Iran. Kamran Aghazadeh opened the congress, which renamed the Edālat Party to the Communist Party of Iran (Justice)—then commonly called the Communist Faction of Iran; later, "Justice" was dropped. The congress observed one minute of silence for Asadollah Ghafarzadeh and fallen comrades. Representatives of the RSDLP and the Azerbaijan Communist Party sent greetings. The congress declared that the Shah's government served British imperialists; the CPI's urgent tasks were to expel the British, overthrow the monarchy, and eradicate feudalism. It warned that excluding the national bourgeoisie from the revolutionary struggle was mistaken, and that conditions in Iran were not ripe for a socialist revolution. The Party's program and statutes, approved by the Central Committee, drew attention from workers and the public. The program stated:

“The Communist Party of Iran, a small branch of the Third International and part of the world proletariat’s army, has entered the field with due courage for the happiness of the world’s toilers and for the annihilation of the Western world-conquerors.”

Subsequently, Reza Khan’s actions left no opening for progressive forces; repeated attacks foreclosed even the smallest opportunities. The lack of a unified analysis of Reza Shah’s class character and the absence of an overall party line bred intellectual confusion among members, soon followed by organizational disarray. Dual leadership emerged: a provisional three-person committee created to handle organizational affairs was not recognized by some former leaders, effectively producing two leadership centers. This made it urgent to convene the Second Party Congress, marking the start of the period’s second phase.

Part Twelve – Lack of Vision and Theory Tailored to Realities

The fundamental flaw of the communists in this period was the same malady their heirs suffered in 1978–79 when confronting the Islamic Republic. Both the "fathers" and the "sons" who called themselves communists, instead of examining objective conditions, the structure of society, and the composition of classes, made imperialism the axis for identifying the nature of the state, society, and classes. They overlooked that imperialism is itself a progeny of capitalism, and capitalism the vehicle through which imperialism enters; without understanding capitalism, one cannot understand imperialism—and so one goes astray.

After disputes intensified and seven years had passed since the First Congress, leading cadres of the Communist Faction of Iran— with the agreement of the Comintern's eastern bureau—decided to convene a Second Congress to adopt a new program suited to conditions in Iran and to elect a new Central Committee. Accordingly, Akhundzadeh and Karim Nikbin opened talks with Avetis (Ā.) Sultan-Zadeh, who for some time had been distant from factional work, to enlist his help in holding the congress and drafting the new program. The Second Congress was held in the autumn of 1927 (1306 SH) near Moscow, with delegates from inside and outside Iran; for secrecy, its venue was publicly declared to be Urmia, and it has since been known as the Urmia Congress. Its key agenda item was how to position the party toward Reza Shah: the congress adopted a decisive policy of struggle against his despotic regime and sharply criticized earlier appeasement and the past progressive appraisal of him. (Ironically, the Russian scholar Ivanov, in *Modern History of Iran*, had—like with Atatürk in Turkey and Amanullah Khan in Afghanistan—correctly assessed Reza Khan as a representative of a national, progressive bourgeoisie.)

The congress also resolved to organize among peasants, women, and the military. It rejected alliances with democratic and reformist forces, and instead approved a front-type structure under communist leadership. Elections produced a Central Committee consisting of Avetis Sultan-Zadeh, Hossein Rezāzādeh-e Sharqi, Jaʿfar Pishevari, ʿAbd-al-Hossein Hesābi, Mohammad Akhundzadeh, ʿAli Sharqi, Hasan Hasan-Zādeh Purāfer, Karim Nikbin, and Mashhadi Kāvyān; the new program, reflecting Sultan-Zadeh's views, was adopted. (By then Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghli had been killed amid Jungle Movement disputes.) The party's sphere of influence—largely northwest Iran, Gilan, and to a degree Mashhad—betrayed inattention to (or absence from) the political-geographical birthplace of Iran's real proletariat, the south and the oil industry. The most important debate was the assessment of Reza Shah and the party's political line toward him. What made this difficult for some was a failure to grasp global currents and the deep shifts in British imperial policy, whose main lines London had long kept concealed.

Britain's traditional policy in Iran and many colonies/semi-colonies was to prevent centralization, keep the central government weak, and threaten it by arming tribes and stirring them when needed, thereby retaining control. It also sowed discord among the tribes to reap the benefit.

The October Revolution's victories and the Soviet state's survival transformed the international scene and capitalism's world system. Hopes that Russian counterrevolutionaries would prevail collapsed. The Fourteen Powers' intervention failed. Foreign troops balked before the Red Army. To fight the first socialist country, longer-range plans were needed—economic and political strangulation and military encirclement. For a tight chain of encirclement, strong centralized

governments were required; Iran was one of the links. Leaving it as a fractured land, forever wrestling with armed tribes and internal forces, would not serve Britain's aims. What London needed was a strong central authority—subservient to imperial interests and hostile to the USSR—that would both protect British oil and block Iran's drift toward Moscow. All key events of the time—from the 3 Esfand coup, to Seyyed Zia's ouster, to Reza Khan's enthronement—should thus be analyzed from this angle, whereas many progressives (including party leaders) still read them through the lens of Britain's old policy. Iran's political-economic situation was in tatters—crisis, famine, and regional warlordisms imperiled security. Reza Khan's rise must be seen as a convergence: his personal will to power to impose nationwide order; Gen. Edmund Ironside's selection of him; the public's desire for security under a strong center; and intellectuals' early support. The analysis that became the template for the Communist Party, later the Tudeh and guerrilla left, was flawed at its root. Britain accepted a strong central state chiefly to secure uninterrupted oil flows to its navy—the instrument of its global hegemony—which required a robust central government in Iran. The thesis that Britain aimed to encircle the USSR via Iran borders on farce: Iran then, and later, could barely defend its own borders, let alone contain the Soviet Union.

Seyyed Zia's moves—arrests of many nobles and notables aligned with Britain, gestures toward rapprochement with Soviet Russia—were staged to gain trust. But he was too well known to inspire confidence. Reza Khan, ambitious and resourceful, could, by expelling Seyyed Zia, win trust while consolidating a strong state and shielding British oil interests. The theatricality ran from Seyyed Zia's dismissal to Reza Khan's coronation, designed to deceive progressive forces. The grandest scene was the campaign against Sheikh Khazʿal. Nationalists hailed Khazʿal's "defeat" as a blow to Britain; party leaders too welcomed it—*Naṣiḥat* greeted Reza Khan's return from the front with the ode: "I am Reza, you are Reza, and the Iranian nation is Reza." Yet, as I argued, Reza Khan's ascent was the intersection of multiple factors: the quest for internal order, state-led modernization sought since the Constitutional era, British oil security, and nationwide law and order in a country whose reigning monarch had been a major hoarder of foodstuffs. Such dynamics nourished within the party a line that nationalized Reza Khan; on the eve of the congress this view had weakened but still prompted the main debate. The congress resolution stated:

"Some comrades, at home and abroad, erred in thinking Reza Khan fought British imperialism. But the hard facts amassed over several years ran counter to those assumptions. Hence the central question before the Second Congress was how Reza Khan rose to power and his political deeds." (*Setāreh-ye Sorkh*, no. 403, Khordad–Tir 1308 / June–July 1929).

The Second Congress successfully analyzed world and Iranian conditions, clarified Britain's main line in Iran, and set the party's basic course. It adopted a new program. Its preamble, on the agrarian question, declared that a future state must eradicate feudal remnants, beginning with abolishing landlordism and gratuitously distributing landed estates—private, waqf, and crown lands—to peasants. The text specified: "Transfer all state, large-landlord, and waqf estates gratuitously to the peasants; confiscate the lands of the Shah, nobility, and khans and distribute them among peasants."

On the national question, it affirmed: “The Party fights for the full freedom and internal independence of the nations living within Iran—even to separation from the center—should the majority of the toilers of those nations so desire.”

A close reading shows that, at least up to Reza Shah’s rise, the revolutionary movement’s economic demand was agrarian reform and the emergence of capitalist relations—issues overlooked during the Constitutional Revolution. Which begs the question: if Reza Shah was not a representative of feudalism and did carry capitalist relations forward—even while preserving British oil interests—should not the Iranian left and CPI at that time have supported capitalist relations against feudalism? What relations did Amanullah Khan in Afghanistan represent that made him “progressive,” while Reza Shah was labeled “reactionary”? Can the national bourgeoisie in the age of imperialism play a role akin to the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie? If not, what realistic expectations could the left have had of Reza Shah, within that historical frame? And, had Iran not bordered Russia—or had the Iranian left not been influenced by or tied to the Russians—would the assessment of Reza Khan have been the same?

The CPI and its militants, with a deterministic reading of Marx/Marxism and Lenin, missed the crucial point that the passage from feudalism to capitalism hinges on a tightening of linkages among a system’s components—so that they become interdependent in a new, higher unity. This misreading—still present today—has left many unable to explain capitalism’s backwardness in Iran, defaulting to grand labels (imperialism, plunder, dependency) to explain everything. Alien to the workings of the economy—especially Marx’s architecture of capital, capitalism, and socialism—and schooled in the Russian “non-capitalist road” from early Comintern days, the left did not grasp that production under feudal (including tribal) relations in Iran, because of its archipelagic fragmentation, could not achieve the horizontal/vertical integration between commerce and craft/industry that Western Europe (notably England and France) eventually forged across their production chains. It was this higher coordination that enabled the West to overcome feudalism—centralizing what had been feudal structures into a modern state. The motor behind this change lay not only in the internal growth of productive forces but also in a state impulse to advance the system, via regulations to restrict raw-material exports and promote finished-goods exports. France and England implemented this earlier than others, accelerating capitalist development. Crucially, they then concealed this playbook from the periphery, discouraging those countries from banning raw exports or boosting manufactures—because the core needed raw materials to process and re-export.

Historically, there was no decisive difference between East and West in potential for transition to capitalism in the late medieval/early modern eras—even if their systems were not identical. In some respects the East’s material base was stronger. Both had internal coherences; trade and craft—whose alignment is the key precondition for capitalist transition—existed in the East too, and sometimes outstripped England and France. Trade in Iran and China largely circulated manufactures, meaning commerce did not destroy craft production. At Safavid high tide, craft employment was so extensive that even by the twentieth century the number of wage-earners in various industries had not matched it. Theoretically, a leap was possible; indeed, until the early seventeenth century the East was the world’s largest producer of goods.

But from the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, England and France steered policy to block raw exports and push manufactures, while imposing the reverse elsewhere. This nurtured their crafts, and, as higher profits lay in exporting manufactures, merchant capital partly flowed into production. That conversion was not the product of some mystical "historical necessity," but of state/legal compulsion and profit calculus over time. In Iran, by contrast, merchant capital veered into land and real estate: importing foreign goods while exporting agricultural staples (opium, cotton, tobacco). Thus, commerce—because of its dependent character—propped up landed relations and blocked craft growth; the same pathology still marks Iran, now in the form of a vast real-estate bourgeoisie—with a handful owning thousands of plots and properties. In principle, merchant capital can move toward industry if unhindered and profitable. Marx described the actual path capitalism took in England: under specific conditions, after passing through state compulsion, commerce aligned with domestic production. In Iran and China, however, production failed to cohere into industrialization. As raw-export / finished-import patterns crystallized (and were later enforced), the economy decoupled internally. The Qajar wars—and China's Opium Wars—exposed the results of a two-century divergence.

Where integration in England/France yielded social then political change—producing an unprecedented centralization and great advances in science, technology, and philosophy—Iran and China moved the opposite way: system components pulled against each other. The comprehensive crisis under the Qajars was the outcome. Trade now undermined craft rather than promoting it—an historically novel role. Up through mid-Safavid times, Iran's socio-economic system had inner coherence, which explains its repeated recoveries after devastation. Trade served to supply inputs to crafts and distribute domestic manufactures (or truly non-convertible raw materials). As foreign commerce gradually changed role, systemic cohesion unraveled: exports drained inputs and imports displaced domestic output—the onset of decline. With craft eroded and the economy decaying, the traditional linkage between scientific/cultural progress and expanding production withered. The system's elements ceased to reinforce one another; foreign trade became a disruptor. Agriculture followed: oriented away from feeding the population and supplying inputs to crafts toward cash-crop exports—seeding famines and further undercutting craft cycles. A classic example: around Kerman the silk complex—mulberry groves, sericulture, reelers, toolmakers, dyers, weavers—formed a complete value chain. Destroying the groves and planting opium enriched landlords and bound them to merchants, but wiped out the whole silk ecosystem. Agricultural income, now severed from national production needs, funded imports, accelerating craft demise. (Under the Islamic Republic's neoliberal "export-led" turn, even essentials are shipped to neighbors for currency that is then invested abroad, with similar damaging effects.)

As systemic cohesion collapsed—crafts dying, social wealth shrinking and concentrated in land rents and export agriculture—all links frayed: town–country, tribe–state, center–province. With less shared social surplus, national cohesion weakened, centrifugal tendencies grew. The Safavids fell not merely because Shah Soltan Hossein was bigoted; his bigotry was symptom, not cause—a product of decay. In the siege of Isfahan, no one came to help; the center sat atop a system where parts had conflicting interests. The crown could only confront crisis by squeezing taxes and tribute from provinces and tribes. With common interests gone, downfall and civil wars were seeded. Nader Shah imagined that looting India would fix the shortfall and restore centralization, but the root was the collapse of domestic craft production and the wealth-creation cycle. His campaigns, by increasing the need for cash, deepened raw-export dependency and became another factor in

destroying crafts and even agriculture. Under Karim Khan, contemporaneous with Britain's domination of India, a faint awareness arose, but after two centuries of decline and with no grasp of the real causes, nor the power to reverse them, nothing fundamental changed. With craft and agriculture decimated, there was no shared economic driver binding classes and regions; everyone vied for the center, and civil strife returned. Agha Mohammad Khan, like Nader, pursued centralization by force—with similarly destructive results. The problem was not foreign plunder per se—if it were, Spain and Portugal would have led Europe. They did not: their colonial loot, funneled into imports, disrupted their own systems. The issue was that Britain used colonial extraction to feed domestic crafts/industry and know-how, while Spain fell behind—analogous to how oil windfalls under Ahmadinejad fueled imports and drove Iran into decline.

To reduce this long, painful, complex history to a one-note anti-imperialist struggle, without analyzing how global imperialism actually operates, left the Iranian left unable to interpret the economy it lived in—and this incapacity had severe consequences for the movement's stage-appropriate slogans, its handling of social classes, and its stance toward state power over the past century.

Part Thirteen — Reorganization of the Communist Party and the Left's Positions

In 1934 (1313 SH), the Communist International (Comintern) assigned ʿAbd-ol-Samad Kāmbakhsh to re-establish the Communist Party of Iran, which had been smashed in 1931–32 (1310–11) and, after the defeat of the Gilan Republic, broken under police blows. Kāmbakhsh, together with Dr. Taqī Arānī and Colonel Siyāmak, revived the organization in a decentralized form: the operational–military wing was kept separate from the propaganda–agitation wing, and none of the three shared their own information with the others. In fact, Arānī and the other members of the "Fifty-Three"—apart from Kāmbakhsh—never met Colonel Siyāmak and did not know him.

In Ordībehesht 1316 (April/May 1937), simultaneous with Kāmbakhsh's arrest, the group known as the Fifty-Three—most of whom had no idea about the party's underground structure—were exposed largely through Kāmbakhsh's confessions and were all detained. Documents and interrogations now published show that Kāmbakhsh—claiming he was protecting the party's military branch (e.g., Colonel Siyāmak and Colonel Qanbar)—wrote dossiers on others he considered "harmless," while keeping silent about the military network. In 1938 (1317), the Fifty-Three were tried in the Tehran Criminal Court under Colonel Hoseyn-Qolī Vahīd; there Dr. Arānī, while defending freedom-minded principles, exposed Kāmbakhsh's betrayal. Despite his cooperation with Reza-shah's police, Kāmbakhsh was sentenced to ten years. He was married to Akhtar Kiyānūrī, sister of Nūr-ollah Kiyānūrī (one of the Fifty-Three). Kāmbakhsh was a Qajar prince; Kiyānūrī was the grandson of Sheikh Fazl-ollah Nūrī.

The left's stances during Reza Shah's rise

First — A cohesive circle of socialist-leaning intellectuals around the journal *Kāveh*, comprising many capable elites. They pivoted to nationalism, arguing that "the vast majority of Iranians are illiterate, rural, and deeply backward," and thus preferred "a patriotic, modernizing strongman." They supported Reza Shah and helped build his bureaucratic state.

Second — The Communist Party of Iran which, after a failed surge in the Jangal (Jungle) Movement—and amid Bolshevik policy shifts toward Reza Khan—split into two camps: one saw Reza Khan as the representative of a "progressive national bourgeoisie", an ally against feudalism and imperialism; the other attacked him as Britain's instrument and a dictator. In 1931 (1310), with the anti-communist law and Reza Shah's repression, the party was outlawed and effectively shut down.

Third — Dr. Taqī Arānī, who in 1933 (1312), with middle-class educated intellectuals, launched *Donya* ("The World") to spread socialist ideas. In 1937 (1316), his group—the Fifty-Three—were arrested and tried; Arānī soon died (was killed) in Reza Shah's prison.

A glance at Atatürk's Turkey and Amanullah Khan's Afghanistan shows those regimes also did not tolerate Marxist leftists. In the imperialist era, especially after the rise of the USSR—and in states bordering it—the "specter of communism" (compounded by ultra-left postures of some communist parties) was no mere ghost; its shadow truly frightened the bourgeoisie.

Part Fourteen — Three Phases of the Communist Party of Iran's Activity

The CPI's activity falls into three periods:

1. From its founding and First Congress in Anzali (June–July 1920 / 1299) to the Second Congress in "Urmia" (actually near Moscow) (1927 / 1306).
2. From the Second Congress (1927 / 1306) to the crushing of all party organizations under Reza Shah's anti-communist law (June 1931 / Khordad 1310).
3. From 1933 (1312)—the party's revival and leadership aided by the Young Communist organization in Europe, the Comintern, the CPSU, and the KPD—to 3 Feb 1940 (14 Bahman 1318), Arānī's death in Reza Shah's prison, and the onset of World War II (1939/1318–1945/1324).

In Sept 1920 (Shahrivar–Mehr 1299), the First Congress of the Peoples of the East convened in Baku. The CPI, headed by Haydar Khan ʿAmu-Oghlū, attended; Mohammad Akhundzādeh met Lenin on behalf of the leadership. The congress rejected Sultan-Zadeh's theses (presented at the CPI Congress) and favored Haydar Khan's line. A month later, a national CPI gathering elected a new CC, replacing Sultan-Zadeh with Haydar Khan as First Secretary. The party declared that Haydar's emphasis on the national bourgeoisie and the peasantry's special role in Iran's transformations had the support of both the CPI and the Baku congress. Unfortunately, due to differences, two central committees continued in parallel.

Reza Khan's rise and repression of the CPI

At this juncture Reza Khan, a 42-year-old officer, trained in the Cossack Brigade, lacking formal political education, reached command of the Cossack Brigade at Qazvīn. With about 3,000 troops, he marched on Tehran. Before moving, he coordinated the coup with British officers, notably Gen. Edmund Ironside, obtaining munitions, supplies, and funds. Near Tehran, he secretly met senior Gendarmerie officers and Seyyed Ẓiāʾ Tabāṭabāʾī—trusted by British agents and the coup's strategist. With Gendarmerie backing and British advisers, Reza Khan entered Tehran on the night of 3 Esfand 1299 (21 Feb 1921), arrested ~60 prominent politicians, and assured Ahmad Shah (r. 1909–1925) the coup would save the monarchy from revolution and Bolshevism.

On the British minister's instruction, Seyyed Ẓiāʾ became Prime Minister and Reza Khan Sardār-e Sepah (War Minister). They annulled the widely discredited 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement and concluded the 1921 Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union—the first equal treaty in modern Iranian history—cancelling Tsarist claims and most 19th-century concessions and securing a pledge that Iran would not be used as a base against the USSR, paving the way for Red Army withdrawal from Gilan. At the same time, Seyyed Ẓiāʾ and Reza Khan retained British advisers to reorganize the army and administration. Seyyed Ẓiāʾ himself told the British minister that annulling 1919 was a ruse to hoodwink Bolsheviks and domestic opponents and to enable a strong central state to block Bolshevism and forces hostile to Britain. Reza Khan steadily became Reza Shah: in Esfand 1299, he entered the cabinet as Sardār-e Sepah; by Ordībehesht 1300, he held the War Ministry.

Social and cultural work in Period I

After its congress, the CPI undertook wide activities, founding associations and publishing outlets:

- Anjoman-e Farhang-e Rasht (1920–21 / 1299–1300) and its Anzali branch;
- Anjoman-e Farhang-e Qazvīn (1924 / 1303);
- Payk-e Saʿādat-e Nesvān (1922–23 / 1301–02), which first celebrated 8 March / 17 Esfand as International Women's Day in Iran;
- Bīdārī-ye Zanān (1926–29 / 1305–08).

Party and allied publications included: *Komunist-e Irān* (edited by Mohammad-Javād Pishevarī, with Kāmrān Āqāzādeh and Neʿmat Basīr); *Haqīqat* (from 9 Dey 1300, editor Seyyed Mohammad Dehqān; initially the organ of the trade-union center, later the party's central organ); *Kār o Peykār* (1921–23 / 1299–1302); weekly *Khalq*; and the theoretical *Jaraqeh* (only two issues, but a forerunner to *Donya* in 1933). Also *Payk-e Rasht* (nationwide distribution), *Nasīhat* (Qazvīn; editor Mirzā Yahyā Vāʿeẓ-e Qazvīnī), *ʿAdālat* (director Hasan Ziyā, a leading CPI cadre), *Enqelāb-e Sorkh* (director the poet Abu'l-Qāsem Zarre), *Lavā-ye Sorkh* (organ of the Iranian Soviet Republic; editor ʿAbd-ol-Hossein Hesābī, CPI member), and *Irān-e Sorkh* (editor Lādban Esfandīārī, Nimā Yushij's brother). The Azerbaijan branch in Tabriz published *Takāmol* (organ of Tabriz trade unions; editor ʿAlī-Akbar Serāj, CPI member) and *Kārgar* in Khoy (editor Mir-Mahdī, a respected figure and founder of a girls' school in the city, and a CPI member).

Without doubt, the ultra-leftism of the CPI's left wing under Sultan-Zadeh—despite his genuine learning relative to others—and the mis-staging of the revolution as socialist when the proletariat numbered well under 3% of the population, exposed a misreading of classes and alignments in Iran. Lenin clearly defined a "revolutionary situation": (1) when the ruling classes cannot go on ruling as before (crisis at the top produces cracks); (2) when the sufferings of the oppressed sharply intensify; and (3) when the activity of the masses rises markedly. Without such objective changes, revolutions do not occur. Neither the CPI under Reza Shah, nor its guerrilla heirs in the 1970s, grasped this and tried, voluntaristically, to topple Reza Shah—and later his son—without a strategic mass organization.

A striking point: up to the 1930s, because of the police climate and South Persia Rifles surveillance, southern oil workers—the real core of the Iranian proletariat—had no linkage with the CPI, and no oil-worker presence is seen in the party's organs. Regrettably, six decades later, self-declared heirs of the left again founded a Communist Party in non-industrial geographies—far from the actual working class—re-proving that "those who learn nothing from the past, learn from no teacher."

Period II of CPI activity

After the Second Congress, the party intensified work under Reza Shah's repression. In 1927 (1306), led by the Young Communist organization, a 13-day strike at Dār-ol-Fonūn began and a Students' Union emerged. In 1928 (1307), for May Day, party-organized strikes hit workplaces. In 1929 (1308), on International Workers' Day, 11,000 oil workers struck for higher wages, an 8-hour day, paid annual leave, company housing, and union recognition. Though APOC raised

wages, the strike continued; the Royal Navy sent a gunboat to Basra, Iranian authorities arrested 500+ workers, and the strike was suppressed; the British Foreign Secretary formally thanked Reza Shah for the "swift and effective" settlement. Five strike leaders remained imprisoned until 1941 (1320). In 1931 (1310), 500 workers at the Vatan textile mill in Isfahan struck for higher pay, an 8-hour day, and one paid rest day per week. Late 1931, two years after the first railway segment was finished, 800 railway workers in Mazandaran mounted an eight-day strike for higher wages—successfully. The organizers of the strike

Crackdown, the "Black Law," and the CPI's Third Period

- Many remained imprisoned until 1941 (1320). Young intellectuals gradually began to voice opposition. In 1930 (1309), Iranian student opponents in Europe convened a congress in Cologne, demanding the release of political prisoners and the establishment of a republic, and calling Reza Shah "a tool of British imperialism." The following year, a group of students in Munich—working closely with members of the Communist Party of Iran—launched a new periodical titled *Peykār* ("Struggle").
- Reza Shah, having now revealed his true face, struck back. Between 1927–1933 (1305–1311), 156 labor organizers were arrested: 40 in Abadan, 30 in Mashhad, 10 in Isfahan, 20 in Tabriz, 32 in Tehran, and 24 from the Educational Association of Qazvin, who were then banished to towns far from their homes.

The CPI's Third Congress and Kāmbakhsh's confessions

The Third CPI Congress was held in 1934 (1313), organized by ʿAbd-ol-Samad Kāmbakhsh under the aliases "Sarvarī" or "Tunberg." It is said that rebels operating around Ahvaz were accidentally exposed and arrested, and one of them fingered Kāmbakhsh, who, on the very first day, was detained and—as Dr. Arānī quipped—"authored a book." It later emerged that Kāmbakhsh's statements were so voluminous one could almost call him the true author of Rousseau's *Confessions*.

Reza Shah's "Black Law" and the bloody suppression of the CPI

On 31 Khordad 1310 / 21 June 1931, Reza Shah—raised in the Cossack Brigade, anti-liberal and especially anti-communist—ordered parliament to pass a public-security law. Under it, members of organizations deemed to endanger the constitutional monarchy or propagate "ishtirākī" (socialist/communist) ideas faced ten years in prison.
Using this vague old term "ishtirākī," the state could crush opponents of any worldview. The assault on the CPI intensified. That same year, police exposed party networks and sent detainees to prisons and torture sites. Some remained jailed until 1941 (1320). A number of cadres—Hejāzī, ʿAlī Sharqī, Seyyed-Mohammad Tanhā, Anzābī, Qolām-Hossein Najjār, Yerovand Yeghikian, and Pour-Rahmatī—were killed in prison. Thus, the CPI's second period (since 1927/1306) ended in 1931 (1310).
That said, despite the 1931 Black Law, Reza Shah's era cannot be equated with mass "communist-killing" in some other countries: only one person—Dr. Taqī Arānī—was killed in Reza Shah's prison on such charges. His harsh repression fell even more on former confidants such as Dāvar,

ʿAbd-ol-Hossein Teymūrtāsh, Seyyed-Hassan Modarres, Nosrat-od-Dowleh, Sardār-Asʿad-e Bakhtiyārī, and Keykhosrow Shāhrokh.

A telling comparison: Amanullah Khan's Afghanistan

It is striking that Amanullah Khan in Afghanistan and Reza Khan in Iran rose at roughly the same time. Reza Khan, shaped in the Russian-trained Cossack force, was staunchly anti-communist and anti-liberal; Amanullah, upon succeeding his father, declared independence from Britain and launched sweeping reforms, particularly in education and women's rights—in some ways deeper than Reza Shah's in Iran. His reforms met fierce resistance from tribes and clergy, and he fell within a decade. Amanullah showed relative tolerance toward the left and, unlike Reza Khan, did not set out to jail them en masse. Even Zahir Shah's behavior toward Afghan leftists was often more lenient than Mohammad-Reza Shah's toward the Iranian left. Still, Afghanistan's left—akin to other Russia-aligned lefts—aided Daoud Khan's coup against Zahir Shah and, after infiltrating his regime, seized power with a Soviet-backed coup, only to tear itself apart in factional bloodletting, before eventually losing to the Taliban amid U.S.–Pakistani machinations.

CPI, Period Three

After the 1931 crackdown, the CPI's activity stagnated for nearly two years (1931–33 / 1310–12). In early 1933 (1312), the Comintern dispatched a special courier and named a representative to restart the party. The CPSU and the German KPD also played roles. (According to Tudeh Party sources—whose full reliability many scholars dispute)—Dr. Taqī Arānī, Colonel ʿEzzat-ollāh Siyāmak, and ʿAbd-ol-Samad Kāmbakhsh were tasked with the revival. Given Arānī's return in 1929/1308 and his open journal *Donya* beginning Bahman 1312 / Feb 1934, it seems unlikely he was among the founders of the clandestine CPI in this phase.
The launch of *Donya* in Iran coincided with fascism's rise in Germany, and marked the start of CPI's third period. By CC decision, *Donya* served as the party's central organ. The editorial board (in effect) comprised Dr. Arānī, Kāmbakhsh, Dr. Mohammad Bahrāmī, Mohammad Shureshiyān, and ʿAlī Sādeq-pūr. Planned as a monthly, it released six regular issues; No. 7 in Shahrivar 1313 / Sept 1934, No. 8 in Āzar 1313 / Dec 1934, and a combined 10–12 in Khordād 1314 / June 1935 (96 pp.). The chief reason for the halt was party underground work and the organizational responsibilities assumed by Arānī and other editors.
On 17 Ordībehesht 1316 / 7 May 1937, after May Day leaflets were distributed at Tehran University, police began arresting the "Fifty-Three" under Arānī. Their trial opened in Ābān 1317 / Nov 1938 after 18 months of detention and torture. In court, Arānī likened the process to Nazi show trials, accused the police of torture, and argued the 1931 law violated constitutional free speech, insisting that no law could stop the inevitable spread of socialism/communism. Though sentenced to the maximum 10 years, Arānī was murdered in Qasr Prison on 14 Bahman 1318 / 3 Feb 1940, at age 36, even as Nazi Germany was igniting World War II. His death ended CPI's third period.
A grim coda: under Reza Shah, among the Fifty-Three, only Arānī was deliberately killed in prison; after the 1953 coup, ~50–80 Tudeh activists were executed; through 1979, total political executions are estimated ~1,800. By contrast, during the Stalinist purges, roughly 5,000 Iranians and ~500 émigré left activists were shot in the USSR; under the Islamic Republic, ~15–20 thousand have been executed, ~2,000 of them Marxist group members/supporters.

Part Fifteen — Who were the “Fifty-Three”?

A quick survey shows the group’s average age was 30–40; they were, in effect, the generation born around the Constitutional Revolution. The core of this heterogeneous circle clustered around Arānī’s intellectual salon and ʿAbd-ol-Samad Kāmbakhsh, Qazvīnī-linked. Arānī’s team aired their views in the scientific journal *Donya*. Besides Arānī, better-known figures included Mortazā Yazdī (noted surgeon), Iraj Eskandarī (jurist; Qajar-line; nephew of Solaymān Mirzā Eskandarī), Rezā Rādmanesh (physics professor, University of Tehran), Bozorg ʿAlavī (prominent writer), Ehsān Tabarī, Anvar Khāmeʾī, Khalīl Malekī, Nūr-od-Dīn ʿAlamotī, and Rezā Rūstā.
In 1937 (1316), after a student strike at the Faculty of Engineering protesting lavish spending to prepare for the crown prince’s visit, the Fifty-Three were arrested for forming a clandestine “ishtirākī” organization, issuing a May Day statement, organizing strikes at the Engineering Faculty and Isfahan’s textile mill, and translating “atheist” books like Marx’s *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*. Five were promptly released, but the label “Fifty-Three” stuck.
After 16 months’ interrogation, their trial began on 11 Ābān 1317 / 2 Nov 1938. Forty-five received 3–10 years. Charged under the 1931 anti-socialist law (which Arānī dubbed “the Black Law”), some had prior communist links, but most were thinkers, not hardened party militants. Their common thread was a shared socialist–collectivist outlook, with internal shadings—social democracy, communism, and national-minded socialism. None embraced the “communist” label in court; many accepted “socialist”, while explicit avowals of “Marxist” were fewer.
They were overwhelmingly Persian-speaking, Tehran-based intellectuals: 42 lived in Tehran, three in Mazandaran, two in Abadan, two in Isfahan; all but one (a Bahāʾī) came from Muslim families. Thirty-three hailed from Persian-speaking regions; others—including Arānī—had entered Persian high culture via state schooling. Twenty-six had higher education; six were graduates of Western European universities. Occupations spanned 2 professors, 4 physicians, 3 jurists, 1 engineer, 3 high-school principals, 4 teachers, 11 civil servants, 11 students, 8 workers, and 1 farmer. The average age was 37.
Notably, only 9 were from lower classes, and only five from Azerbaijan—a departure from earlier left traditions centered in the North and Azerbaijan. As Ervand Abrahamian notes, this was the first time a Marxist group in Iran had recruited largely outside Armenian/Azeri milieus.
The prison population then mixed veterans of the Jangal uprising, old CPI unionists (many Azeris from Gilan), army officers accused of fascism, tribal leaders jailed for rebellion, and notables imprisoned for opposing the Shah. Dr. Arānī died 16 months after the trial—officially of untreatable typhoid, which friends called deliberate medical neglect. The rest were freed gradually after the Allied occupation and Reza Shah’s abdication; on 27 Shahrivar 1320 / 18 Sept 1941, 27 of the Fifty-Three were released, and with the general amnesty the remainder followed.
Upon release, they decided to found a party named—ambitiously—*Tudeh* (“Masses”). Leading figures steering this choice were Arānī’s European comrades—Dr. Mortazā Yazdī (a surgeon from a prominent clerical family in Yazd), Iraj Eskandarī (Qajar-line jurist, Tehran-raised), Dr. Rezā Rādmanesh (Gilani, physics professor), and Bozorg ʿAlavī (already a major prose writer). The face who most **won over public opinion—especially nationalists and liberals—**was the respected elder statesman Solaymān-Mirzā Eskandarī, who accepted the party’s chairmanship.

Who was Solaymān-Mirzā Eskandarī?

Born 1876 (1255 SH) in Tehran, a descendant of Crown Prince ʿAbbās-Mirzā. Son of Mohsen-Mirzā Kafīl-od-Dowleh, grandson of Mohammad-Tāher-Mirzā (a renowned Qajar-era translator). He studied at Dār-ol-Fonūn, entered the police, later holding various posts. He sat in the Second Majles and, until his death, served five terms as MP, and was Minister of Education in Reza Shah's first cabinet. After 1936 (1305) he lost office and—unlike many Qajar nobles—with no income, supported himself as a small retailer.

The Fifty-Three — list of names

1. Taqī Arānī (died in prison) · 2) ʿAbd-ol-Samad Kāmbakhsh (d. 1971) · 3) Ehsān Tabarī (d. 1989/1368) · 4) Mohammad-Rezā Qodveh · 5) ʿAlī-Akbar Shāndarmani · 6) Rezā Rūstā (d. 1985/1364) · 7) Mohammad Pazhūh · 8) Dr. Mohammad Bahrāmī (executed in USSR, 1952/1331) · 9) Mohammad Shureshiyān · 10) ʿAlī Sādeq-pūr · 11) Mahmūd Boqrātī · 12) Ziyāʾ-ol-Motī · 13) Rahīm-ol-Motī · 14) Nūr-od-Dīn-ol-Motī (d. 1965/1344) · 15) Mīr-ʿEmād-ol-Motī · 16) Mohammad-Bāqer Farjāmī · 17) ʿAbbās Āzarī · 18) Nosrat-ollah Aʿzāzī · 19) Akbar Afshān · 20) Mojtabā Sejādī · 21) Hasan Sejādī · 22) Mehdī Rasāʾī · 23) Mortazā Razavī · 24) Seif-ollah Sayyāh · 25) ʿAlī-Naqī Hokmī · 26) Abu'l-Qāsem Eshterī · 27) Fazl-ollah Gorgānī · 28) Valī Khāvojī · 29) Yūsof Saqafī · 30) ʿEzzat-ollah ʿAtīqe-chī · 31) Shaʿbān Zamānī · 32) Hossein Tarbiyat · 33) Rajab-ʿAlī Nasīmī · 34) Bahman Shomālī · 35) Mehdī Lāleh · 36) Taqī Shāhīn · 37) ʿAbbās Narāqī · 38) Mehdī Dāneshvar · 39) Hasan Habībī · 40) Ānāqelīj Khezr-Bābā · 41) Rezā Ebrāhīm-zādeh · 42) Khalīl Enqelāb-e Āzar · 43) Fereydūn Manū · 44) Taqī Makkī-nejād · 45) Seyyed-Jalāl Hasan Nāʾebī · 46) Hakīm-ollāhī · 47) Nosrat-ollah Jahānshāhlū · 48) Khalīl Malekī (d. 1969/1348) · 49) Anvar Khāmeʾī (d. 2018/1397) · 50) Iraj Eskandarī (d. 1985/1364) · 51) Rezā Rādmanesh (d. 1985/1364) · 52) Mortazā Yazdī (d. 2002/1381) · 53) Bozorg ʿAlavī (d. 1997/1376).

Part Sixteen – Who Was Dr. Taqi Arani and What Did He Say?

Taqi Arani was born in September 1900 in Tabriz, into a middle-class family. After his early education in non-religious schools in Tabriz, he moved to Tehran following World War I to study medicine. In 1922, after graduating in medicine, he left for Berlin to study chemistry. There, he became acquainted with socialist theories and gradually devoted his life to the study and propagation of such ideas. Initially, in Tehran, under a strongly anti-British atmosphere, he was a passionate nationalist; however, in Berlin he became more immersed in socialism.

Arani continued to associate with figures such as Hossein Kazemzadeh, who published *Iranshahr* in Berlin, and even collaborated with *Nameh Farangestan*, which some researchers have described as a radical proto-fascist modernizing project. His nationalism remained strong, defending a centralized state, promotion of Persian language, purification of foreign words, revival of ancient Iranian and Zoroastrian traditions, and a model drawn from the Sassanid empire.

Yet, exposure to Marxist thought in Germany shifted his orientation. Arani can be regarded as the third serious Marxist theorist in Iran after Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh and Avetis Sultan-Zadeh. Unlike many later Tudeh leaders, Arani remained independent, principled, and free from factional intrigue.

The Marxism Arani advocated was scientific, rooted in natural sciences, akin to the intellectual tradition of the Second International. As a chemist, he considered Marxism not as dogma but as scientific method. He reportedly attended lectures by Albert Einstein and Max Planck. In 1926, he joined the "Revolutionary Republican Party of Iran" in Berlin, where he worked alongside figures such as Morteza Alavi and Iraj Eskandari. His major contribution was the manifesto *The Treatise on the Statement of Truth*, which declared:

"Just as the bourgeoisie destroyed the aristocracy, the working class in capitalist countries will destroy the bourgeoisie and establish socialism. The 1917 Russian Revolution is proof of this. British imperialism, sensing the Iranian people's discontent with aristocratic rule, found its so-called national man in Reza Khan, whose military campaigns and state-building served only to deceive the bourgeoisie while leaving peasants no better than under the Qajars."

Upon his return to Iran in 1929, Arani taught, wrote textbooks in chemistry, physics, psychology, and philosophy, and organized secret reading circles. In 1933 he launched the journal *Donya* (*The World*), devoted to presenting science, philosophy, and society through a materialist lens. Only 12 issues appeared (1933–1935), but they had a lasting intellectual impact.

Arani avoided crude Leninist calls for armed struggle; instead, he emphasized cultural hegemony and intellectual leadership. Some scholars compare him to Antonio Gramsci, stressing the role of intellectuals as leaders, including educated women, and the importance of cultural struggle preceding political change.

At his trial in 1938, Arani delivered a six-and-a-half-hour defense, declaring:

“You cannot ban socialism or communism; they are part of Western civilization, and Iran has no choice but to modernize along that path. Only laws that serve the masses are sacred. True civilization requires freedom of thought.”

He died in prison in February 1939 at the age of 36, regarded ever since as the intellectual father of Iran’s socialist movement.

Part Seventeen – The Founding of the Tudeh Party of Iran

In September 1941, with Reza Shah forced into exile, political prisoners—including members of the so-called *Group of 53*—were released. On October 10 (or October 15), 1941, following prior discussions in prison, they convened a meeting and established the **Tudeh Party of Iran**.

Although memoirs differ on the exact number present (estimated around 80), the founders came from four currents:

1. Members of the *Group of 53* (e.g., Iraj Eskandari, Zia al-Moti).
2. Former members of the Communist Party of Iran, such as Reza Roosta and Mir Jafar Pishevari.
3. Left-leaning intellectuals, artists, and writers (e.g., Abdolhossein Nushin).
4. Older social democrats and nationalists, notably Soleiman Mirza Eskandari of the Socialist Party of Iran.

Fifteen were chosen as the first Central Committee: Soleiman Mirza Eskandari, Iraj Eskandari, Reza Radmanesh, Dr. Morteza Yazdi, Dr. Mohammad Bahrami, Nour al-Din al-Moti, Abdolsamad Kambakhsh, Reza Roosta, Ardashir Avanesian, Abdolhossein Nushin, Mahmoud Beghrati, Ali Amir Khizi, Mohammad Ali Sharifi, and Abolqasem Asadi.

Initially, the party adopted a minimal social-democratic program within the framework of the Constitutional Monarchy. Yet, soon after, under Kambakhsh's guidance and hidden Soviet support, it expanded rapidly. The Tudeh Party became the largest political organization in Iran (1941–1953), mobilizing workers, intellectuals, students, and women, and achieving unprecedented organizational depth.

However, the party bore a fatal flaw: its subservience to Moscow. Many of its leaders, such as Abdolsamad Kambakhsh, were openly known as *Moscow's men*. After the 1953 coup, the number of such Soviet appointees grew even more, becoming the Achilles' heel of the party.

In addition, Kambakhsh, through his family ties, created the clandestine *Military Organization* of sympathetic officers. The Tudeh Party thus combined genuine mass organization with covert structures under Soviet influence.

Despite significant cultural contributions—publishing Marxist works, translating political novels, shaping intellectual life—the party's political record was tarnished by:

- Its defense of Soviet interests during the Azerbaijan crisis and over oil in the north.
- Opposition to Mossadegh during the nationalization of oil.
- Inaction during the 1953 coup.
- Justifying Soviet collaboration with the Shah in later decades.

Many young members became disillusioned, realizing that the socialism offered by the Tudeh Party resembled the old tradition of obedience to authoritarianism, only now dressed in "democratic centralism."

Figures such as Khalil Maleki and Ebrahim Isaak (known as Dr. Eprime Isaak) split early on. Isaak, born in Urmia to a Nestorian family, was a devoted student of Arani and admirer of *Donya*. After studying in Britain, he joined the Tudeh Party but soon criticized its leadership, publishing two famous pamphlets—*What Is to Be Done?* and *The Tudeh Party at the Crossroads*. He left Iran permanently, becoming a professor at Oxford University.

Other splits followed. Kianouri later remarked that the *Group of 53* divided into four tendencies:

1. Those who fully joined the Tudeh Party.
2. Those who sympathized but refrained from active participation (e.g., Khalil Maleki, Anvar Khamei).
3. Those who abandoned politics for business.
4. Those who joined other groups such as the Socialist Party of Mostafa Fateh.

The Tudeh Party, though organizationally powerful, was haunted by the image of being **Moscow's men**, and later, under the Shah's manipulation, infiltrated by opportunists such as *the man of a thousand faces* created by SAVAK itself to destroy the remnants of resistance.

In sum, despite its organizational brilliance and cultural impact, the Tudeh Party's fundamental reliance on Moscow doomed it. Its intellectual legacy remains immense, but politically, it became trapped in the same destructive cycle it once condemned.

Part Eighteen – The Organization of the Fedai Guerrillas

The Organization of the Fedai Guerrillas (Cherik-ha-ye Fada'i-ye Khalq) was formed in 1971 by two groups of young people who, disillusioned with the failures of the Tudeh Party and the National Front, turned to armed struggle against the Pahlavi regime. This organization, composed mostly of students and university graduates, was sharply critical of the Tudeh Party's peaceful, political–cultural approach and sought instead an armed path.

The two founding groups—though with deliberate tolerance on my part, since the fact remains that the late Bijan Jazani played no role in the actual formation of the Fedai organization, having been imprisoned at least three years prior and thus unaware of its creation—were made up of figures such as Bijan Jazani, Abbas Sorkhi, Ghafour Hassanpour, Ali Akbar Safa'i Farahani, Mohammad Safari Ashtiani, Hamid Ashraf, Masoud Ahmadzadeh, and Amir Parviz Pouyan. These two groups united after the attack on the gendarmerie post at Siahkal on February 15, 1971 (Esfand 26, 1349), carried out by the "Fedai vanguard," and declared themselves as the "Organization of the Fedai Guerrillas."

In their worldview, the Tudeh Party's peaceful and conservative method, known as the "theory of survival," was ineffective under the suffocating repression of the time. The Fedai ideological core, like other Marxist groups of the era, was based on the division of the world into two camps: the camp of capitalism and imperialism led by the United States and all reactionary forces; and the camp of socialist countries, the working class in capitalist countries, and national liberation movements. For them, victory of the socialist camp over the imperialist camp could only come through a democratic popular revolution under the leadership of the working class and its vanguard party. They believed that the way to prepare the necessary revolutionary consciousness was through armed struggle and militant activity.

Yet from the very outset, ideological and methodological differences existed: one pole centered around Jazani, the other around Ahmadzadeh. The main difference prior to the organization's formation was that Jazani and his group emphasized armed struggle in both city and countryside, with greater focus on rural guerrilla warfare, while Ahmadzadeh and his circle emphasized armed struggle and urban guerrilla operations. This difference was eventually reconciled through agreement. Both groups viewed Iran's economic structure as dependent capitalism, but at least one group strongly believed in armed struggle and the strategy of encircling the cities through the countryside.

Overall, particularly in the early years, Ahmadzadeh's theses and methods dominated. These were based on armed struggle and gave little importance to political propaganda. The result was that many members quickly fell victim to SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, and the organization soon faced a dead end. This in turn led to a split: a group of "the remnants of Touraj Heidari Beigvand's comrades" broke away. At first, they mistakenly leaned toward the Marxist faction of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, but in subsequent discussions Taqi Shariati (Shahram), with cunning and acuity, realized that they opposed the guerrilla line from a Tudeh-inspired stance. He broke off talks with them, and they ultimately drifted toward the Tudeh-affiliated *Navid* group.

The serious momentum of the Revolution in 1979 coincided with acceptance of Jazani's theses. The remnants of the Fedai guerrillas, riding on the nostalgia of the martyrs' struggles and sacrifices, joined other revolutionary forces and managed to transform the organization's name into a lasting symbol. The most important theoretical works of the Fedai included: *Armed Struggle: Both Tactic and Strategy*; *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Rejection of the Theory of Survival*; *Azerbaijan and the National Question*; *A Thirty-Year History*; *Islamic Marxism or Marxist Islam*; and *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*.

According to the statements and writings of the last survivors, after the devastating blows of 1975–1976 and the death of Hamid Ashraf, the organization's chief strategist, the Fedai group had virtually collapsed. On the eve of the Revolution, survivors say they numbered barely twenty. Yet the organization's past struggles and the powerful nostalgia they evoked allowed it, after the Revolution, to become the strongest and largest nationwide leftist organization.

Unfortunately, the chronic weakness of Iran's leftist movements—a lack of forward-looking guidance, of a "What Is to Be Done?" program and a clear Marxist theoretical and political line—strangled the organization in the post-Revolution years. The infiltration of rusted-out ex-prisoners into the leadership, along with factionalism and clique politics, led to repeated splits. Ultimately the organization became little more than an appendage of the Tudeh Party, and, under mounting police repression, it succumbed to exile, reduced to a scattered circle of storytellers. At one point, at least ten different groups and circles existed, all carrying the name *Fedai* or *Fadaiyan*.

The major splits occurred as follows:

- **1979**: a split between guerrillas and supporters of continued armed struggle.
- **1980**: the "Organization of the Iranian Fedai Guerrillas – Minority."
- **1981**: the "Left Wing" breakaway.

After exile, the encounter with "actually existing socialism"—revealed as a form of backward state capitalism—and the bitter realities of the so-called Marxist paradise in the Soviet bloc planted the seeds of further fragmentation. Upon arrival in the capitalist West, these splits and defections multiplied. Today, nothing remains of the once powerful Fedai Organization except scattered fragments.

What destroyed the largest leftist organization in Iran, and later other groups, was not only repression by the Islamic Republic's security apparatus, but above all the absence of a coherent *What Is to Be Done?* strategy and serious analysis of *what actually happened*. The aggravating factors were arrogance, the narcissism of freed prisoners, lack of knowledge, blind obedience to Soviet Marxism, and distance from Marxism's essence—freedom, democracy, and mass participation.

As far as I recall, the only current that correctly predicted the trajectory of the Revolution in early 1978 was the *Zahmat Group*, a splinter from the Union of Communists. In issue no. 4 of their journal *Zahmat* they wrote clearly that the left must choose between "Bakhtiar, the pseudo-democrat" and "Khomeini, the pseudo-fascist," and that without doubt it should support Bakhtiar. They warned that Khomeini's rise to power would create a regime resembling the Ba'athist

dictatorships in Iraq and Syria. Taqi Shahram, too, from prison offered a detailed and logical analysis of the regime that was emerging and the confrontations to come. But in the intoxication of the newly-wed "Elder Magus" with the child-bride Revolution, no one listened.

It must also be emphasized that, contrary to the romanticized guerrilla histories, from the early 1960s onward Iran had also seen the emergence of many non-guerrilla political groups and circles. Their impact was limited, largely because their lifespans were short, but they nonetheless existed. The most important included: the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization; its Marxist splinter factions (*Paykar*, *Arman-e Khalq*, and *Ettehad-e Mobareze*); *Setareh-ye Sorkh* (Red Star); the Palestine Group; the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (later the *Party of Toilers* after the Revolution); the Union of Iranian Communists (later, after the Amol defeat and exile, the *Communist Party of Iran – Marxist–Leninist–Maoist*); the *Navid* group aligned with the Tudeh; the Communist Unity group (later the *Organization of Communist Unity* after the Revolution); and dozens of small "Third Line" factions.

Part Nineteen – The Rise of State-Bureaucratic Capitalism in the USSR

What is clear is that the heyday of guerrillas and the guerrilla line in Iran—whatever the global backdrop—coincided with the passivity of political leadership, a lull produced by land reform and the onset of industrialization. Praxis leapt ahead of theory. The "new left" in Iran—setting the Tudeh Party aside—was largely unaware of major left debates abroad and did not know that, already in the 1920s, especially in Italy and Germany, left communists had begun using the concept of state capitalism.
Amadeo Bordiga, leader of the Italian left communists, warned after Lenin's death (1924) that Soviet economic policies—especially the NEP—were in practice restoring capitalist relations in a statist form. Around the same time council communists in Germany and the Netherlands (e.g., Anton Pannekoek) described the USSR not as socialism but as capitalism under state management.

In the 1930s Max Shachtman (a U.S. Trotskyist) grew doubtful about the USSR's "workers' state," and in 1939–40 broke with Trotsky, formulating the idea of bureaucratic collectivism, close in thrust to state-capitalism critiques. The Johnson–Forest Tendency (C. L. R. James & Raya Dunayevskaya) argued explicitly that the USSR was state capitalism: state ownership doesn't equal socialism; socialism requires direct, free workers' control over production—absent in the USSR.

In the 1940s came the first "classic" synthesis: Tony Cliff's *State Capitalism in Russia* (1948), which argued that the Soviet state performed the same systemic role as private capitalists—accumulation via exploitation of labor. Cliff's analysis became foundational for the International Socialists current. In France, Socialisme ou Barbarie (Cornelius Castoriadis & Claude Lefort) depicted the USSR as an exploitative bureaucracy, entirely distinct from any real socialism. In 1957, Milovan Djilas—a top Yugoslav communist—published *The New Class*, asserting that a new bureaucratic class ruled and appropriated surplus much like classical capitalists; the book's impact was enormous because the critique came from within the movement.

What disoriented Iran's guerrilla current—and even some of its critics—was precisely this missing grasp of capital, class, and the logic of accumulation. A telling example is the "explanatory communiqué" justifying the execution of Mostafa Fateh, a generally respected industrial capitalist. The communiqué claimed that by dividing the day into three eight-hour shifts he "intended to intensify exploitation"—as if Fateh had invented shift work. In reality, by the late 19th century many factories ran one or two long shifts (10–12 hours). With mass production and the need to keep machinery running, industries worldwide moved to longer or multiple shifts; during World Wars I & II 24/7 production normalized the three 8-hour shifts. With labor struggles and legislation (e.g., the U.S. federal 8-hour day in 1919, then diffused globally), capitalists switched from two long shifts to three standard shifts. In short, three-shift scheduling was the outcome of workers' struggles and industrial standardization, not some uniquely "heightened" exploitation device devised by Fateh. Had the guerrillas, instead of reading only student-movement tracts, kept ties with oil-industry workers and unions, they would have known that by the 1950s Iran's oil and textile sectors already ran three shifts.

In the 1960s, Paul Mattick (council communist) reiterated that the USSR was a variant of state capitalism, subject to accumulation crises like the West; see his *Marx and Keynes* (1969). Maoist currents worldwide branded the USSR "social-imperialist" (de facto state capitalism), though they idealized China. A few independent Marxists—including some Iranian émigrés—judged both the USSR and China as state capitalist.

Inside Iran before 1979, almost nothing of this literature existed in Persian. The Tudeh's intellectual hegemony in the 1940s–50s, loyal to Moscow, kept such critiques off the table; translation risked denunciation. From the 1960s, the new left translated Fanon, Che, Debray (anti-imperialist and foco-ist works), not the state-capitalism debates. One exception was Djilas's *The New Class*, translated in the late 1960s and influential in universities. But Cliff, Shachtman, James, Dunayevskaya, Castoriadis remained unknown. Astonishingly, even among the strong Iranian left in exile, much of this corpus was neglected.

Only after the Revolution did many Iranian leftists realize that, by 1970, the state-capitalism critique had a long pedigree: Bordiga/council communists (1920s), Shachtman/Johnson–Forest and Cliff (1930s–40s), Djilas (1957), then Mattick and widespread Maoist polemics (1960s). In Persian before 1979, aside from Djilas—and perhaps volume one of Charles Bettelheim's *Class Struggles in the USSR*—little else was available. The intellectual climate was saturated by anti-imperialist and guerrilla literature, not Marxist critiques of the USSR.

Yes, Maoist groups (e.g., the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party; the Union of Communists) produced piles on "Soviet social-imperialism," but often with factory-count statistics and rhetoric that didn't coherently explain relations of production in the USSR; meanwhile, they upheld rural China/Albania/North Korea as socialism—positions that aged poorly. Had more attention gone to venues like Monthly Review and broader Marxist debates rather than the Three Worlds line, the Iranian left might have escaped the sterile Sino-Soviet trench warfare.

Notably, in the very countries that inspired Iranian guerrillas, leading militants and thinkers had already broken with the USSR's myth: figures in Chile's MIR (e.g., Miguel Enríquez, César Magallanes), Argentina (Juan Carlos Marín, Rodolfo Walsh), Uruguay (Eduardo "el Negro" Duhalde), and Castoriadis himself called the USSR a repressive bureaucratic state capitalism. By contrast, much of the Iranian left, constrained by a deterministic dialectic that "history doesn't move backward," used the polite label "revisionist" for the USSR to avoid admitting a class retrogression.

Among Western Marxists who shaped this conversation—Ernest Mandel (*Late Capitalism*), Raya Dunayevskaya (*Marxism and Freedom*), Chris Harman (*Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe*), Adorno/Horkheimer, André Gunder Frank, Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Harry Magdoff, Fredric Jameson—many were dismissed in Iranian guerrilla milieus (shadowing Tudeh habits) as "American Marxists," Trotskyists, or even "CIA tools." Nicos Poulantzas was a rare survivor of this boycott; by the late 1970s some Iranian leftists, already disenchanted with the USSR, were reading him on the state's relative autonomy. Yet broader debates—direct vs. representative democracy, the state beyond simple class reduction, etc.—were still derided as "bourgeois infiltrations."

Strategically, compare Iran's paralysis in 1978–79 with Nicaragua: in August 1978, only 25 Sandinistas, disguised as National Guard, seized the National Congress, took MPs hostage, demanded cash and the release of prisoners; Somoza caved. A month later (Sept. 9) the FSLN called a general uprising. By mid-1979, after combining rural bases with urban insurrection and an acknowledged political leadership, the FSLN took Managua (July 19). Whatever later degeneration, tactically they tied armed action to a social-political root system. In Iran, by contrast, despite immense courage and sacrifice, the left was organizationally detached from mass worker/peasant infrastructures; after 1979 it was rapidly sidelined, crushed in Kurdistan and Turkmen-Sahra, and then broken nationwide in 1981.

Waves of left exile trace this history:

- Wave I: c. 1919–1925 (early Reza Shah).
- Wave II: after the Azerbaijan/Kurdistan crackdowns.
- Wave III: after 1953.
- Wave IV: after 1982–83.

Tellingly, the long-term refuge of nearly all exiles—Moscow-aligned or independent—was not the "homeland of socialism" but Western democracies, where basic freedoms actually existed. For a sense of the humiliation many Tudeh and Majority (Fedaian-Aksariat) leaders endured in the USSR, recall memoirs like Shiva Farahmand's *With the Steps of Catastrophe*: despite warnings from the Soviet embassy and party "men of Moscow," some leaders chose to remain in Iran rather than relive the camp-like dependency they had suffered in exile—a bitter testament to the mirage of the "promised socialist paradise."

Part Twenty – The Absence of Theorization in the Iranian Communist Movement

If we are to judge realistically, the Iranian Left in the twentieth century never produced an original theorist—not in the stature of Marx, Lenin, or Luxemburg, and not even comparable to the theorists of Latin America. What we had, and still have, were chroniclers of events, narrators of "safehouse stories," many of whom often failed to preserve fidelity in their accounts.

Yet, one might argue that those who stood out as theorists, however limited, included Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh, Otis Soltanzadeh, Bijan Jazani, Taqi Shahram, Hamid Momeni, Dariush Ka'idpour, and Mansour Hekmat. By contrast, Ehsan Tabari was mainly an interpreter and propagator of Soviet Marxism, while Noureddin Kianouri was essentially a political tactician rather than a theorist.

Unfortunately, one of the most destructive practices institutionalized by the Tudeh Party—following Stalin and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—was the intellectual assassination and deliberate erasure of individuals who opposed the Party or Stalin. In this regard, the lives of the late Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh and even Soltanzadeh are telling, as their names were systematically omitted from most pre-revolutionary writings.

Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh, born in Baku, is considered the founder of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The very founding of this republic was so impactful that, seventy years after its suppression by the Red Army, it re-emerged from the ashes of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1907, Rasulzadeh published a socialist play entitled *Nagahani Bala* ("Sudden Disaster") in the socialist newspaper *Mashrab-e Takamul*. But only a year later, in 1908, by writing the play *Qaranliq'da Ishighlar* ("Lights in the Darkness"), he began to reveal nationalist tendencies. Staged by the Baku Salvation Society, this was the first time Rasulzadeh raised the question of Azerbaijani autonomy, framing independence from Tsarist Russia as a political demand. The play led to his persecution by the Tsarist police.

These works show that Rasulzadeh, at that time, was torn between socialist and nationalist ideas. In his first play, he articulated socialist beliefs; in the second, he called for Azerbaijani independence. Gradually, nationalism took precedence. In his book *Iran Turkleri* ("The Turks of Iran"), he emphasized the role of Azerbaijanis across the Aras River in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, comparing Tabriz to Marseille in the French Revolution and Thessaloniki in the Ottoman Revolution.

Rasulzadeh became the first and only president of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918, the first president of any Muslim country. He was a co-founder of the Democratic Party of Iran, editor of the newspaper *Iran-e Now*, and an intellectual architect of social democracy within Iran's Constitutional Revolution. Among Azerbaijanis, he holds a highly esteemed status. Fereydoun Adamiyat, in *The Ideology of the Iranian Constitutional Movement*, described him as "a thinker of substance, with a cultivated mind, logical thought, and steadfast character, a man of integrity and virtue." Rasulzadeh's literary output was unmatched by his contemporaries: more than twenty books and hundreds of articles.

Although he ultimately broke with socialism and turned to nationalism and Pan-Turkism, this does not negate his central role in the Constitutional Revolution and the establishment of social democracy in Iran. Whereas the leaders of the Tudeh Party were cheering Stalin's photograph from afar, Rasulzadeh was once a personal comrade of Stalin, even sheltering him while Tsarist police were hunting him down. Later, however, for defending Azerbaijani independence, he incurred Stalin's wrath. If one counts Rasulzadeh's later flirtation with Nazism as a negative mark, it is worth noting that even Kianouri, during his student years in Germany, briefly leaned in that direction.

Among Rasulzadeh's most important works one can mention: *Reports on the Constitutional Revolution*, *The Republic of Azerbaijan and How It Was Formed*, *Nationality and Bolshevism*, *Nezami Ganjavi*, *In the Neighbor's House*, *Our Era's Siavash*, *National Life*, *The Political Situation in Russia*, *The Bankruptcy of Socialism*, and *Futurism*.

My purpose here is to highlight the difference in stature among figures in the Iranian Left. To say that Soltanzadeh, Tabari, Jazani, Ka'idpour, or Hekmat were of the stature of theorists is not to suggest that their ideas were necessarily correct, but rather that they possessed the ability to formulate theoretical frameworks regarding various dimensions of the movement from within the Marxist perspectives they embraced.

A comparative study of the central slogans of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the rise of Reza Shah in the 1920s, the Oil Nationalization Movement of 1953, the Reforms of 1963, and the Revolution of 1979 reveals a striking absence of democracy in all of them. The Constitutional Revolution sought justice, law, and limiting the Shah's power through the creation of a National Assembly. The early Reza Shah era emphasized security, fighting corruption, and modernization through a strong central state. The 1953 Movement's central demand was nationalizing oil and fully implementing the Constitutional Law. The 1979 Revolution demanded the end of monarchical dictatorship, independence, freedom, and social justice.

Looking at these demands—which often overlapped and reflected society's historical wounds—democracy and accountability of rulers were consistently absent. From the Constitutional Revolution to the present, the struggles have been against despotism (whether monarchical or theocratic), for social justice (whose definition remained vague and treated as complementary rather than inseparable from freedom), and for national independence against foreign domination.

Moreover, the Iranian Left never prioritized clearly among these demands. For example, it failed to grasp that relative social justice without freedom is impossible, and that freedom without democracy is equally impossible. We did not understand that freedom has practical precedence over justice, whereas justice has intellectual precedence over freedom. This misapprehension became the foundation of the Left's ideological crisis.

It is important to note that freedom concerns individual rights—the ability of individuals to do what pertains to them—while democracy refers to the political and institutional structure through which people participate in decision-making. One of the Left's fundamental flaws, from the Communist Party to the eve of the Islamic Revolution, was its lack of a clear understanding of economic development. Despite the fact that both Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah pursued

developmental policies that benefited society, the Left—claiming to represent the working classes—failed at any time to align with these policies in order to win limited agreements or concessions that could have transformed the Left's traumatic relationship with the Pahlavis.

Looking back today, it is clear that the land reform era—with all its shortcomings, and despite Mohammad Reza Shah's deep suspicion toward the Soviet-aligned Left (seeing all of us as "Russian Leftists")—presented a historical opportunity. With the slogan "Yes to Reform, No to Dictatorship," the Left could have supported reforms while opposing autocracy, but failed to seize the moment. Another lost opportunity came in 1977, when the Left, at its weakest organizational point, refused to support the January 15 statement of three National Front leaders. History later showed that these figures and their followers could have been the Iranian equivalent of European social democrats, but instead the misguided Left placed its trust in the "Elder Magus," whose satchel contained nothing but the archaic *Velayat-e Faqih*.

Seen with clearer eyes today, one of the most glaring gaps in Iranian Left thought over the past century has been its failure to take seriously the social and political psychology of the Iranian people, classes, and culture. Globally, such questions had been studied since after World War II. Yet for decades I have not seen a single Iranian Leftist text dealing with these themes. The Iranian Left's mental framework was political power based on political movements, rather than social movements emerging from civil institutions.

This was particularly evident in Gramsci's writings, where social psychology and cultural hegemony were central. Social psychology studies how individuals think and behave in social interactions and how groups, cultures, and norms shape them. Political psychology, on the other hand, examines how people form political attitudes, make political decisions, and engage in participation such as elections and protests. By ignoring such dimensions, the Left misunderstood both society and the balance of its forces, mischaracterizing feudal structures as socialist revolutions, or mistaking anti-modern feudal remnants clashing with U.S. capitalism for anti-imperialism.

The result was a long chain of flawed analyses, misguided slogans, and distorted alignments, leading us into a whirlpool from which, nearly half a century later, we have yet to emerge.

A survey of Iran's political parties from the Constitutional Revolution to 1979 shows how decisive their roles were in shaping the peaks and troughs of modern history. Even if many scholars consider these parties weak and ineffective, their influence on political events and discourse cannot be ignored. Careful study of their history remains essential for shaping Iran's future.

The absence of theorization in Iran—from the Constitutional Revolution to today—has been the Achilles' heel of all social movements. The difference between theorization and mere declaration is clear: theorization produces a coherent intellectual framework, a scientific–philosophical analysis, and a system of thought that explains events, processes, and social forces, offering both prediction and strategy. The theorist seeks to answer *why* and *how*. Their product is a book, treatise, or analytical essay—not merely slogans or communiqués. Marx's class analysis of revolution, Lenin's theory of imperialism, or Popper's theory of the open society are examples.

By this definition, Soltanzadeh—despite his ultra-leftism—might be considered the only true theorist of his era. It was this absence of real theory that prevented the Iranian Left from understanding the social fabric well enough to embed itself beneath the skin of society, in living social movements rather than mere university circles and intellectual salons.

From the Constitutional era onward, many prominent secular political figures wrote of secularism and the separation of religion from state, leaving behind enduring essays and poems. Yet the guerrilla Left remained silent, fearing to upset its Mojahedin allies. With the exception of the late Bijan Jazani's *Islamic Marxism or Marxist Islam*—published only after the Revolution—there was almost no political–theoretical writing on religion or secularism. The very delay of Jazani's book revealed the guerrilla Left's fear of confronting religion and its failure to address secularism.

The unique strength of Jazani, despite his loyalty to the Soviet socialist camp (which later caused internal deviation in the Fedai Organization), was that from his youth he had been personally active in people's struggles. His analyses were not only based on study but also on lived experience and his broad connections with writers, artists, and political activists. Perhaps only the late Mostafa Shoa'ian and Amir Parviz Pouyan could be compared to him in terms of such broad connections.

Yet it later became clear that the Achilles' heel of Jazani and many others was their lack of mastery over Marxist political economy, preventing them from fully grasping the social relations of capital and labor.

Part Twenty-One – The Left's Blindness to Understanding Political Islam and Fundamentalism

In comparison with the Constitutional Revolution, the guerrilla line and the leftist movement after Reza Shah never managed to critically engage, from a political–theoretical standpoint, with the religious current and its ideological foundations. In opposing the dictatorship of Mohammad Reza Shah, they practically closed their eyes to the reactionary nature of broad segments of the religious forces merely because they too opposed the Shah. The same phenomenon occurred in the approach of significant parts of the Iranian left toward groups like Hamas and the Palestinian question, as well as toward the *Fada'iyan-e Islam* led by Navvab Safavi.

In Iran, and specifically within the Iranian left, anyone who opposed or fought against Mohammad Reza Shah was automatically identified with the "revolutionary camp." Yet the formation and emergence of the *Fada'iyan-e Islam*—descendants of Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri—was inherently reactionary and regressive. Here we must highlight a central knot in the Iranian left, especially the guerrilla movement: these individuals and groups, in practice, set their own demands and ideals as a substitute for the Shah's policies and the Pahlavi regime's programs.

For example, when analyzing the land reform program, they expected the Shah to actually carry out a genuine agrarian revolution. But only a revolutionary bourgeoisie could possess such a character. The Shah—though neither he nor his father were representatives of Iran's landlords and feudalism—was in fact the representative of dependent state capitalism, and thus capable of no more than the limited land reforms that were actually implemented. Measuring the actions of regimes with the "scales of Marxism" was fundamentally flawed. Rather, one had to evaluate the Shah's policies within the framework of the political regime ruling Iran.

Had we adopted such an approach, it would have been natural during the events of June 15, 1963, to openly and unashamedly defend the reforms and to raise the slogan *"Yes to Reform, No to Dictatorship"* loudly enough for even the Shah to hear.

Part of this distorted perspective of the left stemmed from its misunderstanding of the stage of revolution and of wealth production in society. The historical outlook of the Iranian left was inspired by religious notions and based on a kind of utopian "Abuzar-like socialism," imagining that if poverty were divided equally—*"zulm bel-saviya adl ast"* (injustice divided equally is justice)—that would be ideal. Yet Marx and Engels' entire argument was about enabling the wage-earning class to gain the full fruits of their labor in order to achieve the genuine distribution of wealth—and nothing more.

This flawed understanding was, in essence, opposed to economic development, even when undertaken by capitalists, and instead leaned on religious-like illusions about the "equal division of poverty," rather than the creation of more wealth by the true producers—society's workers and producers. Naturally, society's workers and producers were not only industrial laborers but all wage-earners who, in fact, participated in the creation of wealth often even more than workers alone.

The consequence of this mistaken view was that Khomeini was placed in the camp of the poor of the revolution, while the true creators of wealth were pushed into the camp of the counter-revolution. And the outcome was exactly what should never have happened.

In this regard, perhaps the perspective of Dariush Homayoun, one of the state officials under Mohammad Reza Shah, is more fair than others. He stated: «“Overall, when I look back at the efforts of two generations of Iranians over the past fifty years, I see that all of us lost, all of us came up empty-handed, and all of us reached the conclusion that what we wanted was neither practical nor possible. Those who fought against that regime, and those who cooperated with it, today are all in the same situation. Only one group succeeded in reaching their goal: the religious opponents of the regime, who for years were most despised by the educated classes and intellectuals of Iran. But gradually, as the regime weakened, their power increased .»

In other words, the lion’s share of the 1979 Revolution ultimately went to “the third thief.”

Part Twenty-Two – A Summary of What Has Passed

In the autumn of 1299 (1920), the country's political deadlock reached a critical point. After the resignation of Hassan Pirnia (Moshir al-Dowleh), none of the Tehran statesmen had the ability to form a government—nor was anyone willing to accept such responsibility. Rebellions and disobedience had broken out in various corners of the country. "Ahmad Shah was a cowardly procrastinator who not only did nothing, but—hoarding public provisions like economic plunderers—was bent on profiteering, regardless of the fact that he was, nominally, the king of the country. After his death and the revelation of his will, it became clear that this 'great monarch of a Muslim nation' had made substantial investments in the London stock market and in real estate." Meanwhile, leading figures of the Constitutional era had either lost their credibility and gone into exile, been killed, or withdrawn from politics.

In truth, the rise of Reza Shah was the result of the chaos of governments and parliaments during the Constitutional period, which—after the Constitutional Revolution—were either battling despotism or, during World War I, paralyzed by fear of the occupation of Tehran. Constitutionalism expended all its strength resisting tyranny and war, and what remained was a disordered country stricken by famine, where autonomous micro-regimes had sprung up in every corner. Though he emerged on the political stage with British backing and through a coup, Reza Shah owed his Reza-Shah-hood to the persistence and resolve he showed in imposing order as Sardar-e Sepah and then as prime minister. Shrewdly, he realized that, due to state dysfunction, power lay ownerless in the streets; and in the absence of an active political organization or movement, he seized power by a coup intended to end the stalemate and insecurity—only to establish a historically unprecedented despotism. Iran's civil society was too weak to resist the emergence of this autocracy.

Authoritarianism is a kind of hyper-etatism which—whether in the capitalist form of **Nazi Germany** or the state-socialist form of **state capitalism** (the Soviet Union)—ruthlessly suppresses civil society, which ought to hold the state accountable. In a totalitarian system, all economic power is concentrated in and controlled by the state without limitation; the state directs every aspect of production and distribution. The Reza-khan/Rezā Shāhi state fell squarely within such authoritarian types. He seized the state, yoked civil society's organizations, and brought all economic activity under control. In assessing the events of the 1920s (1300s SH), the Iranian left forgot that Reza Khan's and the Cossack Brigade's victory followed a series of political ebbs and flows that were by no means inevitable. A host of objective and subjective factors aided Reza Khan—above all, the inaction and ineptitude of his political rivals and, of course, his own determination and decisiveness in grasping power.

During this period, the first series of the journal **Kaveh** (1915–1919 / 1294–1298 SH), published in Berlin by a number of Iranian intellectuals, leaned toward socialism. As Matin Asgari writes: "In this period Kaveh displayed a clear affinity with German Social Democracy… In the summer of 1917 (1296 SH), Taqizadeh and Abdolhossein Sheybani went to Stockholm to represent Iran in discussions with socialist leaders. Their assumption then was that 'socialists would soon embody the great governing power in the world.'" But from 1919 (1298 SH) onward, Kaveh's socialist tendency pivoted to nationalism. From then on, Kaveh favored an "enlightened, far-sighted autocrat" over a "democratic social revolution," stating explicitly that they preferred "a patriotic,

civilized, power-seeking autocrat"—a good, progressive, civilization-minded despot (like Peter the Great in Russia, the Mikado in Japan, or Muhammad Ali Pasha in Egypt), or an intellectual dictator such as Mussolini. This "nationalist turn" was based on the belief that the vast majority of Iranians were illiterate, rural, and severely backward and therefore incapable of grasping the country's urgent needs. The rise of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in Turkey and his top-down reforms also reinforced this view.

A small Communist party in Iran—**the Edalat (Justice) Party**, founded in 1917 (1296 SH) in Baku by Iranian migrant workers in Russia—held its first congress in 1920 (1299 SH) in Bandar-e Anzali, adopted the name **Communist Party of Iran**, and elected **Heydar Khan Amo-Oghli**, the renowned leftist revolutionary of the Constitutional era, as secretary-general. The first practical emergence of a communist current in Iran dates to 1920 (1299 SH), when the newly formed Communist Party joined the **Jangal (Jungle) Movement** in Gilan Province. After the October Revolution, the Red Army, seeking to secure its Caucasus front and strike the Whites' rear, entered Anzali, supported the Jangal Movement, and helped establish the **Gilan Soviet Republic**. But as soon as the young Bolshevik government withdrew support (due to compromise with Britain), the central government of Iran—backed by the British—crushed the Gilan Republic. Armed clashes between nationalist and communist factions, and finally repression by the central state (under the leadership of Reza Khan, then Minister of War), quickly disintegrated the Gilan Soviet Republic.

After Reza Shah consolidated power, a semi-military dictatorship replaced constitutional rule. In the Majles, figures such as **Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh** and **Mohammad Taqi Bahar**—a socialist-democratic national poet—who had supported strengthening the central state under Reza Khan, opposed his autocratic ambitions. By contrast, the clerics of Qom opposed a republic and supported Reza Khan's monarchy.

Communists were split into supporters and opponents. After its unsuccessful venture in the Jangal Movement—and especially after Moscow shifted its policy toward Reza Khan—the **Communist Party of Iran** was thrown into confusion. One faction considered Reza Khan the representative of a "progressive national bourgeoisie." The other attacked him as Britain's tool and a dictator. In 1931 (1310 SH), with passage of the **Law Prohibiting Communist Activities**, the party was outlawed and leftist activists were legally persecuted. Many party leaders (e.g., **Jafar Pishevari**) were imprisoned thereafter, or forced to leave for the Soviet Union (like **Avetis Sultan-Zadeh** and many others). With this, even underground activity became impossible, and organizational work effectively ceased.

Dr. Taqi Arani, who returned from Germany to Iran in 1929 (1308 SH), initially taught sciences and wrote textbooks in the natural sciences and scientific method. Unlike some former friends (like **Taqizadeh**, who defended nationalism, modernism, and progress under Reza Shah and served as an adviser), and unlike segments of the Communist Party (who defended "enlightened despotism"), Arani criticized Rezā-Shāhi despotism and the country's growing dictatorship. In 1933 (1312 SH) he launched the journal **Donya** ("The World"), aimed at cultural-intellectual work to disseminate leftist ideas in Iran—"clarifying scientific, industrial, social, and artistic subjects from a materialist perspective." Donya represented a **positivist** Marxism, sought to propagate a new "scientific ideology," and saw its mission as enlightening an emergent, modern, educated, and growing middle-class stratum. In effect, Arani and his colleagues sought **cultural hegemony** and

social leadership by middle-class intellectuals—their outlook closer to **Antonio Gramsci's** theories of "cultural Marxism" for social transformation than to Leninist social revolution. Publication of Donya (only twelve issues) stopped in spring 1935 (1314 SH). In 1937 (1316 SH), members of Arani's circle (the "**Fifty-Three**") were arrested and tried; most received long prison terms. In his 1938 (1317 SH) trial, Arani invoked **Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu** as defenders of liberty and spoke in defense of "Western democracy." He was sentenced to ten years, but was killed shortly after in Reza Shah's prison.

Khosrow Shakibi, in *Taqi Arani in the Mirror of History*, writes: returning to Iran in early 1930 (1309 SH), Arani witnessed Reza Shah's campaign against communism. He concluded that, under political repression and cultural stagnation, the most effective course was publishing **Donya** to promote modern knowledge. He sought to continue limited, low-profile legal activity to shield his small group from police harm. Learning from the suppression of Communist Party leaders and activists, he saw the only viable path in activity **independent of the Comintern**. This independent method—adopted with foresight and a sound assessment of domestic conditions—provoked the old party cadres' distrust; they viewed any activity outside Comintern lines with suspicion and took a negative view of Arani and Donya.

Summary of the Country's Social Conditions and the Record of Leftist Organizations and Intellectuals in This Period

After the 1906 Constitutional Revolution (1285 SH), Iran entered a period of statelessness and chaos. The feeble Qajar government and its ineffectual bureaucracy could no longer run the country or ensure internal security and border control, nor provide basic services. Constitutional revolutionaries had shattered Mohammad Ali Shah's despotism, but they could not build an efficient state and bureaucracy. Between March 1907 (Esfand 1285 SH) and Reza Khan's premiership in 1923 (1302 SH), governments changed more than thirty times. The **1912 (1291 SH)** occupation of northern Iran by Russia and the south by Britain deepened the crisis. Famine, anarchy, and a bellum omnium contra omnes were the results of the absence of a strong state. The gloom was not limited to foreign occupation, political chaos, banditry, military expeditions, and internecine strife: human losses and material shortages ravaged the populace. With Reza Khan Mirpanj's **1921 (1299 SH) coup**, an effective central state emerged, but within five years—abandoning the republican option—Reza Khan ascended as **His Majesty**, inaugurating the hereditary **Pahlavi** monarchy. A weak civil society knelt before a strong, despotic state and submitted. Technocratic, bureaucratic, and cultural elites—especially in the first decade—assisted the new regime in foundational reforms and modernization. They built a centralized state with modern institutions, infrastructure, and education. Many of these elites, however, later became victims of Reza Shah's personal despotism after he consolidated power. An unchecked state rampaged over an enfeebled society.

The left's main forces in this period comprised:

First – A coherent circle of socialist-leaning intellectuals around **Kaveh**, including many able elites. They later pivoted to nationalism, arguing that "the great majority of Iranians are illiterate, rural, and deeply backward," thus preferring a "patriotic, civilized, power-seeking autocrat" and hastening to support Reza Shah and to build his state bureaucracy.

Second – The **Communist Party of Iran**, which, after its failed role in the Jangal Movement (and with the Bolsheviks' policy shifts toward Reza Khan), split: one faction saw him as a representative of the "progressive national bourgeoisie," to be treated as a leader of the national struggle against feudalism and imperialism; the other denounced him as Britain's instrument and a dictator. In **1931 (1310 SH)**, with the crescendo of Reza Shah's anti-communist policy and the law banning communist activity, the party was outlawed and effectively shut down.

Third – **Dr. Taqi Arani**, who in **1933 (1312 SH)**, with a group of educated middle-class intellectuals, launched **Donya** to propagate socialist ideas. In **1937 (1316 SH)**, his group (the "Fifty-Three") was arrested and tried; Arani was killed shortly after in Reza Shah's prison.

The Years After World War II

With the end of WWII and after Reza Shah's exile in **1941 (1320 SH)**, the presence of Allied forces in Iran, the enthronement of **Mohammad Reza Shah** (young and inexperienced), and the weakening of the central government ushered in a twelve-year **political breathing space**. Statesmen were still largely Qajar-era notables. The machinery of state repression faltered. Short-lived cabinets came and went, but the limited capability of the state opened space for civil society and political life to re-emerge. This same weakness enabled extremist currents like **Fadā'iyān-e Islam**, who assassinated the historian **Ahmad Kasravi**, killed two prime ministers (**Abdolhossein Hazhir** and **Ali Razmara**), and attempted assassinations against **Hossein Fatemi** (foreign minister) and **Hossein Ala** (court minister).

In this period, the **Tudeh Party of Iran** declared itself as an anti-fascist, constitutionalist, socialist movement supporting the Allies, and—until the **1953 (1332 SH) coup**—it was the hegemonic left force in Iran's political and intellectual life. At its founding, the party gathered diverse and sometimes sharply contradictory left tendencies. Its first platform referenced preserving national independence, establishing democracy, and ensuring individual and social rights. In later years, however, its ideas and practice drew closer to other **pro-Soviet** communist parties. From the perspective of democracy (the central theme here), one must note the contradictions in the party's activities, reflecting two different currents within it.

The **first current**—often dubbed "revolutionary/Marxist-Leninist"—ultimately turned the party into an instrument for advancing Soviet state and Communist Party policies in Iran. For this current, the interests of the **USSR**—as the main redoubt of world socialist revolution—took precedence over national interests and democratic imperatives elsewhere. Many of its members had prior activism in the Communist Party during Reza Shah's era and residence in the USSR. Among its prominent figures were **Abdol-Samad Kambakhsh** and **Reza Rousta**.

Ervand **Abrahamian** writes of the two: **Kambakhsh**, son of a Qajar prince, was born and raised in Qazvin and sent to Russia for schooling at fourteen (1917/1296 SH). Influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution, he joined the Communist Party on his return. In 1928 (1307 SH), he again went to Russia on a state scholarship to study mechanical engineering. In 1932 (1311 SH), tasked by the Comintern with reviving Iran's Communist Party, he returned, joined the Iranian army as a second lieutenant, taught engineering at the military academy, and headed the army's mechanics school. Arrested with the "Fifty-Three" in 1937 (1316 SH), he later co-founded the Tudeh Party,

and his military ties seeded the party's clandestine Officers' Organization. **Reza Rousta** (b. 1901/1280 SH), son of a Gilan peasant and a graduate of the agricultural school in Rasht, joined the Communist youth there. After the Jangal suppression he went to the USSR, studied two years at the party school in Moscow, then returned to organize unions in Tehran, Isfahan, and Bandar Abbas. He was first arrested in 1930 (1309 SH) and again in 1937 (1316 SH) with the Fifty-Three.

Eric Hobsbawm notes that such Comintern-faithful communists sincerely believed the Soviet Union to be the best alternative to capitalism and, thanks to its economic superiority, destined soon to "bury" capitalism and exploitation. Given the deep links between this Tudeh leadership stratum and the USSR/Comintern, it is unsurprising they were not democrats but sought to establish an authoritarian regime modeled on the Soviet system. Though this current never seized power in Iran, parallels from elsewhere in the Third World indicate what they had in mind.

The second current, the reformists, largely came to Marxism through university education and exposure to Western European left movements (e.g., Reza Radmanesh, Fereydoun Keshavarz, Iraj Eskandari), or from cultural and artistic circles sympathetic to socialist ideas (Bozorg Alavi, Abdolhossein Nushin, Ahmad Shamlu, Fereydoun Tavallali). Some, dissatisfied with party policy, later split to form the Third Force; others stayed but ultimately drifted away.

The most prominent of these dissatisfied intellectuals was Khalil Maleki (1901–1969 / 1280–1348 SH). Educated in Germany, he was imprisoned with Arani's "Fifty-Three," joined the Tudeh Party soon after its creation, but in 1947 (1326 SH)—after the "Northern Oil" affair and the Azerbaijan Democratic Party episode—he led the first major split, bringing along many prominent party intellectuals. The activities and writings of the Third Force that Maleki later shaped gradually showcased an Iranian left's transition toward democratic socialism, and its intellectual and ethical independence from Bolshevik socialism. During the Oil Nationalization Movement, Maleki stood with Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh for democratic goals. The "God-worshipping Socialists" led by Dr. Mohammad Nakhshab paralleled this tendency in an Islamic register. The Third Force was among the first social-democratic movements of the Third World, seeking a distinct path for Iranian social democracy.

At its inception, the Tudeh Party drafted the most comprehensive program of modern social reforms in Iran, pioneered modern party organization, introduced and advanced trade-unionism, founded the **Central United Council of Workers' and Toilers' Unions** (then the largest, most organized mass movement), organized hundreds of thousands of workers—men and women—from oil workers to carpet weavers, and fought through nationwide strikes and political action to improve their conditions. It organized Iranian women in a party structure for the first time and emphasized equal rights. Politically, within a semi-democratic constitutional regime, it sought parliamentary influence and even held ministerial posts in **Qavam al-Saltaneh's** cabinet. It elevated professional journalism and profoundly influenced public culture. Most cultural elites initially fell under its intellectual sway.

Party activists—mostly educated urban youth—approached the toiling classes with zeal and sympathy, acquainting many of the downtrodden with leftist ideas and winning them over. People who, for the first time, saw the attention of the educated and relatively affluent, became steadfast supporters of the left. Many party youths, having experienced disciplined organizational work,

cherished this period; numerous low-income youths, aided by Tudeh activists to study and rise socially, kept their loyalty even through the suffocating years after the coup—and passed it to their children. It was no surprise that when the Tudeh leadership returned after the **1979 (1357 SH) Revolution**, they still found a considerable base of surviving supporters. Two major episodes in the 1940s (1320s SH) exposed and deepened splits between the two currents:

First, in **November 1944 (Aban 1323 SH)**, the USSR requested a concession to exploit the **northern oil** fields (from Azerbaijan to Khorasan). The first current supported granting it; the second was hesitant or opposed. The first current prevailed: pro-concession speeches by party MPs, a wide press campaign, and even a large street demonstration in Tehran—backed by Soviet soldiers' trucks—touted the concession. **Dr. Mossadegh** opposed it.

Second, the Tudeh Party's stance toward the **Azerbaijan Democratic Party** founded in **1945 (1324 SH)** under **Jafar Pishevari**—a former Communist Party leader who had "found no proper place in Tudeh." With Soviet troops in northern Iran, Tehran's central government wielded little power there. **Fereydoun Keshavarz** recalls that **Sadegh Padgan**, provincial secretary of the party in Azerbaijan, told him: "Tomorrow our entire party organization in Azerbaijan will separate from Tudeh and, with the comrades' approval in the Soviet Union, join the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, whose formation will be announced tomorrow." **Khalil Maleki** writes in his memoirs: "All Tudeh members and even the great majority of the Central Committee disapproved of this—but the 'sacred line' compelled them to defend it. What necessity? What compulsion? The necessity of being 'internationalist'! Which internationalism? The **Stalinist** concept."

According to **Touraj Atabaki**, **Mir Jafar Baghirov**, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Azerbaijan, sought to incorporate Iranian Azerbaijan into the USSR. Moscow, however, was not monolithic: first, it feared Western reaction to such "annexation"; second, it aimed to use Azerbaijan as leverage to extract **northern oil** concessions, making acceptance of such a plan a condition for troop withdrawal. Under an agreement between **Ahmad Qavam** (prime minister) and **Ivan Sadchikov** (Soviet ambassador) in **April 1946 (Farvardin 1325 SH)**, the USSR agreed that:

1. The "Azerbaijan Question" was "an internal matter of Iran," to be settled "peacefully through reforms under existing laws and with goodwill toward the people of Azerbaijan";
2. A mixed company would be formed for the northern oil, the plan to be submitted to the Fifteenth Majles; and
3. Soviet forces would withdraw from Iran within six weeks.

After the Soviet withdrawal, the autonomous government could not stand on its own. When the central army entered Azerbaijan, "over **300 insurgents** were killed in battle, **30** executed by firing squads, and around **1,200** fled to the USSR"—tragically, many Iranian émigrés were later executed in Stalin's USSR, perhaps in numbers exceeding those killed in Iran in the suppression of the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan.

Reformist-leaning members fiercely protested the party's conduct in these two episodes, calling such policies an **ethical bankruptcy**, ashamed before the people. **Sadegh Hedayat** (previously sympathetic to Tudeh) wrote to reformist friends: "The matter is lengthy and strange, but it was a

two- or three-sided treachery; now the Tudehis are smearing themselves with filth to cover the essence of the matter. In any case, we must eat our excrement-stained glories spoon by spoon and say bon appétit."

The reformists demanded a **national congress**; it was anticipated they might take leadership. The ruling leadership refused to convene it, and the prospect of a split grew. Some reformists (like **Abdolhossein Nushin**) argued for staying and reforming from within. The **split declaration** appeared in **December 1947 (Dey 1326 SH)**. The seceders were few in number but included many renowned intellectuals. **Radio Moscow** condemned the split. The Tudeh leadership reacted harshly, publishing a pamphlet, *"The Third Force: The Social Base of Imperialism,"* denouncing the secession as "incited by imperialism to shatter Iran's democratic movement," and accusing **Maleki** of ties to the British. Shocked by the severity—from the Soviets, no less—the seceders became housebound for a time. Yet the split set in motion the emergence of an **independent Iranian socialism** committed to democratic principles.

After the Azerbaijan affair and the crackdown, some senior leaders (e.g., Iraj Eskandari, Ardeshir Avanesian, Abdol-Samad Kambakhsh, Reza Rousta) sought asylum in the USSR. A larger group of leaders (e.g., Reza Radmanesh, Fereydoun Keshavarz) migrated after the February 1949 (Bahman 1327 SH) failed assassination attempt on the Shah and the party's banning. Over ten imprisoned leaders were broken out by the party's clandestine Officers' Organization—Kianouri, Jodat, Ghassemi, Yazdi, Alavi, Nushin, Hakimi, and Shandermani among them—some went into exile, others underground. With arrests and migrations, leadership shrank effectively to six: Kianouri, Foroutan, Ghassemi, Jodat, Mohammad Bahrami, and Mohammad Yazdi. In practice Yazdi and Bahrami wielded little influence; leadership fell to the other four, who were in constant conflict. In 1952 (1331 SH), Kianouri and Jodat contrived to send Ghassemi and Foroutan to the USSR under the pretext of attending China's revolution anniversary—removing them from the field. The Youth Organization was led by the very popular Nader Sharmini, close to Kianouri; after the coup, he was arrested, stood firm, spent ten years in prison, and—in a secret letter from prison conveyed by his mother to Maleki—apologized and "bowed to his scientific judgment and moral courage." Kianouri and Jodat, operating underground in Iran, were summoned to Moscow in 1955 (1334 SH), remaining in exile until 1979 (1357 SH).

Once the party was banned and forced underground after 1948 (1327 SH), the space for internal debate vanished; the voice of any critic (e.g., cadres like Dr. Mohammad-Hossein Tamaddon-e Jahromi, who advocated supporting the National Front and Dr. Mossadegh) was stifled. The clandestine military organization (hundreds of junior officers) gained freer rein; a "strike team" carried out political assassinations, and the party took on an adventurist hue. Thus, even at the height of the Oil Nationalization movement under Dr. Mossadegh, the remaining leadership failed to read critical junctures accurately and to decide wisely—for example, boycotting the 1949 (1328 SH) Sixteenth Majles elections, dismissing the contest as a struggle between "British spies" led by the Shah and "American spies" led by Mossadegh and the National Front. One motive for hostility to the National Front was that Mossadegh sought nationalization of **all** Iranian oil—thereby depriving the USSR of a northern concession.

Maleki, later reflecting on the **1947 (1326 SH)** split, expressed doubts, writing self-critically that perhaps, instead of seceding, they should have stayed—adopting the later approach they took

toward the **Second National Front**—and might have been more effective. Those who stayed kept the party's organizational apparatus; the seceders endured isolation. The first current now freely branded them traitors and spies, squeezed remaining reformists inside the party, advanced pro-Soviet alignment without opposition, and crushed future dissent.

Summary of the Left's Divergent Currents in This Period

First – The **Tudeh Party**, which began with diverse left currents, gradually became tightly aligned with the USSR. Its activities strengthening civil society (unions, civic associations), its parliamentary presence, and its intellectual prestige all waned—due both to repression and to an increasingly pro-Soviet orientation. Consequently, it failed to articulate an effective policy to bolster democratic forces (the Oil Nationalization movement) against conservatives (court-led). After the **1953 coup (28 Mordad)**, the party's in-country activity ended; it remained in exile throughout the Pahlavi era, absent from Iran's political life.

Second – The **independent, national socialist current** (the "**Third Force**"), emerging from the **1947 (1326 SH)** split under **Khalil Maleki**. In the ensuing years, it pursued an ever more independent, national policy and strongly supported the **Oil Nationalization** movement. The Third Force was Iran's first democratic, national socialist organization, but it never gained the breadth and organizational power of the Tudeh Party.

After the 28 Mordad Coup

With the **1953 (1332 SH)** coup, **Mohammad Reza Shah's** regime—backed by Britain and the United States—became an autocracy that suppressed civil society by eliminating opponents.

The Tudeh Party was removed entirely from Iran's political scene, but the **Third Force** remained active. They relaunched the journal **Elm o Zendegi** ("Science and Life"), publishing analytical pieces that criticized, within limits, current policies and conditions. **Maleki** and his colleagues believed that, under any circumstances, one must use whatever space exists to keep the light of socio-political struggle burning. In **1958 (1337 SH)**, with an economic crisis and a shift in U.S. policy—now seeing economic/political reforms and modernization in developing countries as bulwarks against socialist revolutions—a prospect of relative political opening reappeared.

The Third Force contacted leaders of the Second National Front and, in 1960 (1339 SH)—amid peak economic and political crisis—founded a new organization: the Society of Socialists of Iran's National Movement. At this time Dr. Ali Amini led a group of intra-regime reformists opposing the Shah's policies. Despite some National Front hostility toward socialists, the Society stood alongside and effectively supported the Second National Front, while criticizing its stance against Amini; they argued the main thrust should be directed at the Shah and his entourage, not at Amini–Hassan Arsanjani.

When the Shah realized the Americans insisted on land reform, women's suffrage, and similar measures, he turned his back on his old allies (landlords, conservative politicians, and clerics), visited President Kennedy, and promised that if the U.S. withdrew support for Amini, he himself would carry out the reforms. Thus the premiership passed from Amini to Asadollah Alam.

The 1960s and 1970s (1340s–1350s SH / 1960–1970)

After the events of Khordad 1342 (June 1963) and their brutal suppression by the army, the period of relatively open politics came to an end, and once again an autocratic government repressed society.

Following the failure of talks between the Second National Front and Asadollah Alam, and disagreements with Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh over methods of work and changes to the Front's charter, Allahyar Saleh (head of the National Front's executive board) announced a policy of "patience and waiting" and declared the Second National Front dissolved.

After these events, efforts were made to revive the National Front, known as the "Third National Front." Because Dr. Mossadegh was under house arrest in Ahmadabad, several National Front leaders were imprisoned, and the rest were under intense surveillance, consulting with Mossadegh to organize and draft the Third National Front's charter faced serious obstacles. Despite all the difficulties, the charter was drafted in early 1344 (1965) and approved by Mossadegh. Thus, on 7 Mordad 1344 (1965), with the participation of the Freedom Movement of Iran, the Society of Socialists of Iran's National Movement, the Nation of Iran Party (Dariush Forouhar and associates), the People of Iran Party (Dr. Kazem Sami, Dr. Habibollah Payman, and others), and the University of Tehran Students' Organization (mostly left-leaning), the Third National Front was formed, officially declared its existence, and sought once more to energize opposition politics in Iran. But three weeks later, Khalil Maleki and the leadership of the Society of Socialists were arrested after the Front's third meeting and sent to prison. Bazargan and leaders and activists of the Freedom Movement had already been arrested in 1342 (1963) on charges of acting against national security and were in prison.

Maleki and his colleagues, in the military court, firmly defended themselves, the record of the Society of Socialists, the National Movement, and its leader Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, and were sentenced to prison. With the closure of the political opening of 1337–1342 (1958–1963) and after the arrest and trial of Khalil Maleki and other leaders of the Society of Socialists of Iran's National Movement, a distinct period of leftist political activity in Iran came to an end.

Ervand **Abrahamian**, quoting **Khalil Maleki**, defined the **"Third Force"** as follows: "Independent of Western imperialism and the Soviet Union, independent of the Tudeh Party and the ruling class, independent of domestic militarism and international communism," allied "with the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with social-democratic movements in Europe, and with disaffected members of the Tudeh Party who are dissatisfied with its undemocratic, Soviet-directed leadership." While the Third Force defined itself as the **"left wing of the National Front,"** it was also critical of **Dr. Mossadegh's liberalism**, which it believed was unable to mobilize popular support for social reforms broader than nationalizing the oil industry. After the 28 Mordad 1332 (1953) coup, Maleki and his associates never ceased political work; they expressed their ideas in legal, moderate left publications that were permitted public circulation in the 1950s and early 1960s: **Nabard-e Zendegi** (1955–1956 / 1334–1335), **Elm o Zendegi** (1959–1962 / 1338–1341), and also **Andisheh va Honar** (published 1954–1973 / 1333–1352).

When asked how a socialist periodical like *Nabard-e Zendegi* (published with the military governor's permission) could be socialist, Maleki replied: "Has socialism, throughout history, only been advocated in countries that did not have a military governor?" He added: one must choose between two methods—"revolutionary overthrow of the existing regime, or a peaceful parliamentary path." Democratic social transformations, he argued, **cannot** be achieved "through adventurist methods and conspiracies carried out by a handful of serious activists working underground." In his view, instead of slogans about overthrowing capitalism, one should look to the European socialists who, using parliamentary principles and the mechanisms at hand, sought to change those regimes from within and rebuild society—gradually—in favor of the toiling classes.

The **Third Force** was the first emergence of militant, independent **Marxist intellectuals** in Iran who deeply believed in democratic principles. They preserved intellectual–ethical independence from **Stalinism**, maintained the capacity for critical engagement with "Western" ideology, had the courage to stand up to **Soviet-backed communism**, and fought against the **ruling class** (backed by Britain and the United States). The guiding idea of the Third Force was **democratic socialism**.

In the years after the post–June 1963 crackdown, with severe restrictions on legal and public activity, Iran's **leftist movement radicalized sharply**. Having weathered the crisis, the Shah began to suppress and arrest leaders of opposition currents. **Khalil Maleki** and other members of the Society of Socialists, as well as activists of the **Freedom Movement**, were arrested, tried, and imprisoned. With these two currents—symbols of Iranian democratic socialists and religious reformists—removed from the scene, a new phase of political struggle began in Iran. In his 1343 (1964) military court defense, **Mehdi Bazargan** said: "Mr. Presiding Judge! We are the last group who, accepting and respecting this current constitution, pursued political activities within legal frameworks. **After us, no one will accept this constitution.**" Just as young religious opponents of the Shah's dictatorship "moved past" the Freedom Movement and founded the **Mojahedin-e Khalq** to begin armed struggle, non-religious youth, too, turned to **guerrilla warfare**.

The radicalization of the left was influenced not only by the Shah's harsh repression but also by the **global climate**. To better grasp that atmosphere: **Che Guevara** was killed in Bolivia in October 1967 (Mehr 1346) and became a central symbol of student movements. **1968 (1347)** was declared the "Year of Che Guevara" by **Castro**, and Cuba became a model of revolutionary rebellion for leftist youth around the world. In East Asia, China's **Cultural Revolution** (1965–1969 / 1344–1348) drew youths' attention as a sign of revolutionary vitality and an assault on ruling elites. On **10 Bahman (30 January) 1347 (1968)**, the **Viet Cong** launched a massive offensive against major southern Vietnamese cities; U.S. policy in Vietnam plunged into deep crisis amid repeated defeats, dealing a heavy blow to America's credibility. Anger among intellectuals and radical youth at America's "counter-revolutionary" policies surged. The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, through an international tribunal, indicted the United States for war crimes in Vietnam. After the 1967 Arab–Israeli War (1346 SH), anti-American sentiment grew stronger. Widespread Black uprisings in the U.S. after the April 4, 1968 (15 Farvardin 1347) assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. reached a new peak in the Black movement and boosted more radical forces like the Black Panthers and Black nationalism. The Prague Spring and the entry of Soviet tanks to crush reform in Czechoslovakia severely tarnished the USSR's credibility among these forces.

Universities in Western Europe and the United States—greatly expanded since the war to train the technical cadres required by industrial society—witnessed the radicalization of student movements. In Germany, Britain, and Spain, repeated student–police clashes shook society. In France, students joined workers in struggle. Student movements turned from traditional opposition-party politics to direct action and the streets. The radical youth movement mocked social hierarchies, the "rule of law," and "democratic decision-making" processes, challenging elections and parliamentary representation, and pursued direct democracy through worker control of factories, self-managed cooperatives, participatory decision-making, and decentralized management. Their methods were rebellious, outside legal frameworks and the confines of "established systems." They argued that with postwar capitalist growth and rising general affluence, human beings had fallen into **alienation** and **consumerism**. **Herbert Marcuse's** *One-Dimensional Man* served as the manifesto of this outlook. They contended that the promises of modernity and the modern society were a big lie: capitalism offered high material standards and comfort in exchange for our **enslavement** to industrial machines. Activists claimed that while upper and middle classes enjoyed abundant consumption, workers' real incomes were falling, and that there was a large gap between what students were promised and the reality—especially for lower-class graduates who ended up in boring, lower-paid jobs compared to their upper-class peers.

This **New Left** sharply criticized both **communism** and **social democracy**, rejected party politics in the classical sense, and sought an internationalism **outside** the two Cold War camps (West and East).

Thus, two serious factors drove the left's radicalism from 1963 (1342) up to the February 1979 (Bahman 1357) Revolution:

First – A severe climate of repression inside Iran that removed all moderate activists from the scene—by imprisonment, house arrest, or enforced inactivity. The Shah's autocracy steepened rapidly, and the regime's dreaded security organization, **SAVAK**, became the all-powerful force over politics and society.

Second – The **radical global atmosphere**, what **Hegel** called the **spirit of the age**.

A **new generation** of youth entered the struggle, mostly university students. Their parents had fought in the past—some had experienced prison—but now, under the heavy despotism of the 1960s, they kept their heads down to keep their families' lives going, occasionally reminiscing about bygone days. The children of this generation, the young people newly turning to politics, **rejected** the path of their elders, **looked down** on their experiences as conservative, and sought new modes of social change. This generation was fervent and ready to **sacrifice** their lives (which, in a society like Iran at that time, inspired respect and admiration). A major **generational rift** had opened.

Activists of this new cohort—some like the Ahmadzadehs (children of National Front activists), others like Bijan Jazani (children of Tudeh Party members or former members of its Youth Organization)—believed the previous left had not been radical enough and had been obedient to the Soviet Union. Young people now needed to articulate a new discourse of liberation struggle in

Iran. Their inspiration came from anti-colonial national liberation movements in Africa, Latin America, and Asia that sought to remain independent of both Cold War poles. These movements—from Cuba to Algeria, from Palestine to Vietnam—were engaged in military confrontation, urban guerrilla warfare, and armed struggle. The heroes of this generation were Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and Djamila Bouhired. Rather than heeding communist parties, they took as models groups like the Tupamaros in Uruguay, the Montoneros in Argentina, and MIR in Chile—though, as noted earlier, they did not fully grasp those groups' experiences. Daring and audacious, they shattered Marx's guiding lamp and fell into the trap of thinking that people in the Third World suffer only from external oppression (colonizers and domestic tyrants). Yet the result of popular movements' defeats and oppressors' victories is the internalization of repression in people's psyches, manifested as passivity, will-lessness, and deep inertia among the subjugated. When our resistance is savagely repressed, we are left with nothing but grumbling, mockery, and feigned ignorance. Thus we lapse into a fatalistic submission, avoid "dangerous" political activity, and tell our children: "Politics has no mother or father," and "these things are for our 'betters'." People settle for scraping by day to day ("hold on to your hat so the wind doesn't blow it away"), become overly prudent, and leave the "more important" matters to those above (the holders of power).

Activists of the radical movement, in response to their parents' advice, said they did not seek politics for personal gain—they sought the liberation and happiness of the 'people.' They emphasized the primacy of action, praxis, and activism, considered debate and theorizing a waste of time, and wrote: "More than ever we need practitioners, not impatient theoreticians." They were impatient, looking for shortcuts and quick results, assuming that eliminating the dependent and oppressive regime would make everything right.

In reality, the Fedayeen-e Khalq guerrilla current should be seen as a movement that wanted to go another way… They had no formal program, did not think about forming a state, but thought about insurrection—arming the masses so the armed people would critique the system. They did not look upward. Their initial one-sided emphasis on arms—though later tempered under the influence of Bijan Jazani's ideas—gave way to a greater focus on society. The defendable, admirable element in the Fedayeen was this different gaze. Yet as they continued, lacking a program of "what must be done," they reduced matters to the slogan "The Shah must go" and "overthrow"—without knowing what should arise. At the decisive moment, lured by the deceptive promise of "Iran's Blossoming," they were caught in the dark chamber of the Islamic Republic and the camp-style hell of state socialism, squandering the Fedayeen's proud history for a pittance.

Part Twenty-Three – The Background to the Emergence of the Peykar Organization (Organization for the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class)

Examining Peykar as the major independent left current after the Majority/Minority split in the Fedai Organization is essential to any serious review of the Left in Iran. According to documents, the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK) was formed between 1967 and 1969 by *Mohammad Hanifnejad, Saeed Mohsen,* and *Abdolreza Nikbin-Roodsari*. After *Nikbin-Roodsari* left, *Asghar Badizadegan* was elected to the leadership. The dominant theoretical figure of the group—Abdolreza Nikbin-Roodsari, known as "Abdi"—had set the tone.

Following the 1971 arrests and blows that led to executions and the detention of leading cadres, leadership passed to *Ahmad Reza'i, Bahram Aram,* and *Shamkhi*. After *Reza Reza'i* escaped from prison, he joined the leadership circle; but following his killing by the Pahlavi regime—and after *Taqi Shahram* escaped from Sari prison—the leadership of the MEK fell to Bahram Aram, Taqi Shahram, and Majid Sharif-Vaqefi.

Shahram, influenced in prison by *Hossein Ezzati-Kamreh* (from the *Setareh-ye Sorkh* group), had been exposed to Marxist ideas, though he was not yet a Marxist. Even before Shahram's escape—and as early as 1971—it became clear that some founding MEK members such as *Mohammadreza Abbasi, Bahman Bazargan,* and *Rasul Meshkinfam* had turned toward Marxism in prison. After Shahram's escape and internal debates, in 1975 (1354) Taqi Shahram and Bahram Aram, both in the organization's center, formally adopted Marxism and proclaimed it the MEK's ideology. Those who opposed were sent to factory work, shuffled internally under pressure to accept the change, and a few, tragically, were physically eliminated with chilling ruthlessness.

At this point the MEK had split into three broad camps: Islamists, Marxists, and syncretists. The Islamist and syncretist currents were mostly in prison, inactive outside; the Marxist current controlled the organization, carried out numerous operations, and built a broad clandestine structure. Their major actions included the attempted assassination of Gen. Price, and the assassinations of Brig. Gen. Saeed Taheri, Louis Hawkins, Col. Schaefer, and Col. Turner. The ideological transformation—a bloody caesarean—combined with an unaccountable centralist despotism (posed as "democratic centralism") produced the murder of three core cadres and the purge of others who refused the ideological shift, inflicting grave damage on the broader struggle.

From late 1976 (1355), as external cadres returned to Iran, mounting internal criticisms—especially over the political and ethical corruption of the center—gradually removed Taqi Shahram from MEK leadership. Shahram and two associates in the center were step-by-step purged and fled abroad. The main figures who seized organizational control were Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani and Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani. Their first communiqué was the last to bear the title "People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran." Their next communiqué added the suffix "Marxist–Leninist" (M.L.) to mark a distinct organization. This shift was the first public sign that those who had themselves become Marxists—and had, for a time, endorsed the former center's moves—were now deposing Shahram and his allies. In Mehr 1357 (Oct. 1978) this current issued a lengthy statement challenging the previous center's entire record and explicitly condemning the organization's ideological assassinations.

On the eve of the Revolution, the Marxist-turned remnants of the MEK cohered into three largely aligned groups, with minor differences:

1. Organization for the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class (Peykar) – led by *Hossein Rouhani, Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani, Ghasem Abedini, Masoud Jigave'i* — with *Hossein Rouhani, Torab Haqshenas, Pouran Bazargan, Mohsen Fazel, Ebrahim Nazari, Hasan Alad-Poush*, and *Afkham Ahmadi* among its known figures.
2. Unity and Struggle for the Ideal of the Working Class – *Jalal Qa'edi, Saeed Yazdanian*.
3. Combat for the Liberation of the Working Class – led by *Amir Hossein Ahmadian*.

A key common denominator of these three—and their main divergence from the Eastern-bloc-aligned communist currents—was their characterization of the USSR as "social-imperialist." At this juncture they formally rejected the guerrilla line and endorsed political work among the masses. Of these, Peykar had the strongest organization, discipline, and numbers, distinguishing it from other Marxist groups.

On 7 December 1978 (16 Azar 1357), Peykar announced its formation through the famous communiqué "Forward to Building People's Armed Cells," setting out its tactical line toward the mass upsurge of the time. (Indeed, had Peykar actually pursued this "armed-cells" line during the days of insurrection, it would likely have played a more decisive role. But the organization was so absorbed in intra-group routines that, while the Revolution and the people were advancing it on the streets, would-be vanguards were busy with theoretical wrangling in safehouses.)

After the Revolution's victory, contact became possible with many circles and groups inside and those just returned from abroad. Preliminary discussions on the future of the communist movement and the formation of a Communist Party of Iran yielded agreement—between official and unofficial delegates—that, at the earliest opportunity, a unity conference should be held to negotiate organizational unification. That first meeting—known as the "Unity Conference"—convened in late Bahman 1357 (Feb. 1979), exactly one week after the Revolution's victory, with thirteen groups:

1. Unity and Struggle for the Ideal of the Working Class
2. Combat for the Liberation of the Working Class
3. Peykar (Organization for the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class)
4. Fighters for the People's Freedom of Iran
5. Fighters of the Working Class
6. Combatants on the Road of the Working Class
7. The Union of Iranian Communists
8. Freedom Fighters of the Working Class
9. Supporters of the Working-Class Movement
10. Militant Workers
11. The Combat Committee
12. Peyvand (Link)
13. Revolutionary Unity for the Liberation of Labor (Toil)

Principles raised and approved at this conference were:

- Defining the Soviet state as imperialist;
- Identifying the Tudeh Party CC as its agent;
- Rejecting the guerrilla line;
- Affirming the democratic stage of the revolution and the establishment of a People's Democratic Republic;
- Affirming the necessity of forming a Communist Party of Iran;
- Practical work among the working class (appropriate to each group's conditions and capacity);
- Possessing a minimum organizational–structural coherence (i.e., not being merely a circle).

Perhaps the main outcome—despite the failure of the overall unification—was that groups became acquainted and preconditions for partial unities emerged. Thus, "Militant Workers" and "Supporters of the Working-Class Movement" united with Peykar; "Unity and Struggle for the Ideal of the Working Class" united with the "Combatants of the Working Class"; and Revolutionary Unity (Markaz) was formed by seven groups, most of which had attended this very conference. Notably, none of these groups had any real base inside the working class; many of their intellectuals put on workers' garb and entered factories to "bring the banner of working-class emancipation" to the workers.

A major burden Peykar carried from day one was the public's negative perception stemming from the exposure of intra-organizational killings during the ideological shift. As noted, Peykar's members were Marxist-converted former Mojahedin; after the 1975 shift they committed crimes including the assassination of Majid Sharif-Vaqefi—a bitter memory that continued to weigh on the revolutionary movement and militant Islamists. Beyond the general public and revolutionaries, even the MEK under Massoud Rajavi, reorganized after the Revolution, pressured and effectively ostracized Peykar. *Torab Haqshenas* of Peykar writes: "The public atmosphere was extremely hostile toward us former Mojahedin who had changed ideology. Insults, accusations of betrayal, and the like rained down on us. Simply resisting this wave of ostracism, suppression, and pain required a special stamina. We were not only shunned by those who had come to power; the Rajavi-led MEK also fanned this situation."

Structure and Organization of Peykar. Leadership rested with a "Council of Responsible Cadres" numbering eleven: *Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani, Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani, Masoud Pourkarim, Ahmad-Ali Rouhani, Behjat Mehrabadi, Shahram Mohammadi, Mazaher Mahmoudi, Ghasem Abedini, "Salim" (alias), Masoud Jigare'i,* and *Mohammad Namazi*. The council split into three collectives that worked separately but met jointly when necessary. For day-to-day affairs, the council elected a four-person Executive Committee: *Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani, Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani, Shahram Mohammadian,* and *Ahmad-Ali Rouhani*. Each council member supervised one or more collectives and relayed council positions and decisions down the line. This structure held until after the Revolution and the first organizational congress; following the Esfand 1357 (March 1979) congress, organizational form and leadership were overhauled.

After the Revolution, some members and cadres demanded that the council answer publicly for not participating in the people's struggles and the February insurrection. The mounting critiques culminated in a broad demand for a congress to elect leadership and set the line in various areas. The council, despite the lack of prior preparation, accepted and drafted rules whereby each local

cell (typically 3–4 members) would send one delegate to the congress, with a few attending as observers. Elections were conducted quickly; the main sessions were held in Esfand 1357 with 14 participants:

Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani, Ghasem Abedini, Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani, Shahram Mohammadian, Mohammad-Ali Rahmani, Masoud Pourkarim, Mohammad Namazi, Behjat Mehrabadi, Ahmad-Ali Rouhani, "Salim" (alias), "Ayoob" (alias), Nasrin Izadi ("Manizheh"), Abbas Madani ("Faramarz"), and *Mazaher Mahmoudi*.

This congress elected the central leadership: *Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani, Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani, Ghasem Abedini, Alireza Rahmani,* and *Shahram Mohammadian* as full members, with Masoud Pourkarim and Mohammad Namazi as alternates—both soon upgraded to full members.

Agenda of the congress: analyze the new post-uprising conditions; class analysis of the ruling power and Peykar's line toward it; and the election of a new leadership. After extensive debate, two resolutions emerged, each supported by different members.

A) The Majority Resolution. It argued that the popular revolution, despite certain gains, had stalled halfway after the 22 Bahman uprising due to the conciliatory character of its leadership; much remained to reach completion. Since the people had not attained their political goals, they would, in the not-too-distant future—and through political awareness gained in daily life and confrontations with state power—recognize this reality, re-enter the field, and through a renewed uprising, complete the revolution and bring their true representatives to power.

In its class analysis of the ruling bloc, the resolution identified two wings:

- One wing representing the middle bourgeoisie, defending the interests of capital as a whole in Iran; it would stand to the end with the bourgeoisie—i.e., the liberals.
- The other wing, the prosperous traditional petty bourgeoisie rooted in the bazaar, represented by Ayatollah Khomeini. This current had an established, long-standing relationship with the state. Against the Shah it displayed revolutionary, progressive features, yet it remained inconsistent and would be drawn to compromises with the liberals. The Provisional Government rested mainly on the liberals, while the traditional petty bourgeoisie predominated in the committees and the Revolutionary Council.

Despite their coalition, the resolution insisted their contradictions not be ignored. Born of divergent class positions, these contradictions produced a form of dual power in the political sphere.

B) The Minority Resolution

From the viewpoint of the congress current that formed the minority, the 22 Bahman uprising was merely the starting point of Iran's revolution and must be continued. The betrayal of the liberals and other conciliationist forces who seized political power created a pause in the revolution's advance and deepening; but this pause is short-lived. The masses will quickly discern the anti-people nature of the regime, resume their revolutionary motion, and overthrow it. This resolution recognizes the coalition of the liberal bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, but argues that the

petty bourgeoisie—because of its conciliatory tendencies—has lost any revolutionary edge and must be fought directly.

After the First Congress, the initial task was to draft the resolutions, especially the majority resolution, since the organization's propaganda had to be based on those positions. The next step, immediately after the congress, was to publish a booklet titled "Program of the Provisional Revolutionary Government." This program—somewhat akin to a communist minimum program (the Democratic Republic of China program)—was proposed by several central members, approved by the leadership, and released externally without any internal debate, even within the leadership itself. The third major step was launching the organization's official weekly, Peykar, whose first issue appeared on April 28, 1979, slated to come out every Monday with mainly political-agitational content. The editorial board, headed by a member of the center, Mohammad Namazi, consisted of 5–9 members who, for the most part, lacked experience; consequently the paper's quality remained low for quite some time, improving only gradually as the board learned from experience. In April 1979, Torab Haq-Shenas, newly returned to Iran, joined the editorial team and worked to raise the paper's standard.

Beyond the weekly *Peykar*, the organization launched a worker-oriented organ titled "Kargar Be-Pish" (Workers, Forward). Only six issues appeared by mid-1979, and it then ceased. Additional periodicals included Peykar-e Kordestan, Peykar-e Azerbaijan, Peykar-e Daneshjoo (Student), and Peykar-e Theoric (Theoretical). The latter began after the Second Congress.

The Second Congress

The First Congress had stipulated that the Second Congress be held one year later. Thus in early winter 1979, members and cadres pressed the leadership to prepare for sessions in Esfand (March) or Farvardin (April). The congress convened, with an agenda to decide:

1. Analysis of Soviet society and state;
2. The economic structure of society and the revolution's stage;
3. Analysis of the ruling bloc and its participating forces;
4. Determining the organization's tactical line;
5. Analyzing the organization's crisis and remedies;
6. Unity of the communist movement and forming a Communist Party of Iran;
7. Adopting the organization's statute;
8. Electing the Central Organ.

Following the sessions, the new leadership was set: Mazaher Mahmoudi, Masoud Jigare'i, Mohammad-Ali Rahmani, Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani, and Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani as full members; Shahram Mohammadian and Ahmad-Ali Rouhani as alternates.

After the Second Congress, the center divided responsibilities:

- Mohammad-Ali Rahmani – Theoretical Committee & Education Committee;
- Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani – Head of the *Peykar* editorial board;

- Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani – Students' & Pupils' Organization of Peykar; liaison with groups and abroad;
- Masoud Jigare'i – Central organs: communications, logistics, press/printing, finance, forgery, electronics, security, strike force, etc.

A new editorial council for *Peykar* was appointed to publish weekly per the Second Congress line: Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani (responsible), plus Torab Haq-Shenas, Kamal, and Asghar (i.e., Mehrdad Darvish-Pour and Kamal Ijadi).

The Theoretical Committee was tasked with producing papers on: the Soviet economy's structure, state bourgeoisie, the nature of the Islamic Republican Party, analysis of the Iran–Iraq War, assessments of mass-movement conditions, etc., to circulate internally and, when needed, publicly. Peykar-e Theoric was to publish these outputs. Although intended as a bimonthly, publication was delayed; the first issue addressed the Iran–Iraq War and the organization's (and others') stance on it.

Geographic Analysis of Organizational Activity

After the First Congress, the organization sought to consolidate and expand in Tehran. A strengthened Tehran Committee was formed; more members—across ranks (cadre, element, candidate, member, supporter)—were sent into factories, viewed as core productive bases. The organization also expanded in the provinces. Beyond earlier footholds in Azerbaijan and the North, it prioritized Khuzestan and the southern oil/industrial belt, first forming a sub-committee that later matured into a full committee. It also entered Kurdistan, believing nationally oppressed regions were readier than "Fars" areas to fight the regime, with the Kurdish people the most important among them. A Kurdistan Committee was formed, which moved—especially through Kurdish intellectual sympathizers—to begin political (and later military) work, often in relation to KOMALA (Organization of Revolutionary Toilers of Kurdistan).

After the Second Congress, regional committees grew quantitatively and qualitatively, especially in Khuzestan, Kurdistan, and Azerbaijan. The Khuzestan Committee extended into Fars and the South—notably Shiraz and Bandar Abbas. With help from local sympathizers, a committee was established in Sistan & Baluchestan; initially, Peykar guided local groups while they kept their own structures, later uniting them into Peykar.

Positions of the Organization

To assess an organization's practice and dominant outlook, one must examine its stance toward key national events during its lifetime:

- Islamic Republic Referendum (March–April 1979): Peykar called for a "No" and boycott.
- Draft Constitution (June 1979): Rejected as ignoring the demands of the people and minorities.
- Assembly of Experts Election (Aug. 1979): Unlike the IR referendum, Peykar participated—fielding candidates to expose the regime rather than to legislate.

- Seizure of the U.S. Embassy (Nov. 4, 1979): A sharp test. A 4–3 majority in the center did not deem it an anti-imperialist action, but rather a move by the petty-bourgeois wing (Imam-line students/IRP) against the liberals within the ruling bloc's intra-factional struggle. For the first time, the organization assessed both wings of the ruling power—including Imam-line forces—as counter-revolutionary.
- Constitutional Referendum (Dec. 1979): Peykar boycotted, alongside the Independent Teachers' Association, University Organization, Jama'at-e Azadi, MEK, Fedai, PDKI, KOMALA, and Association of Kurds in Tehran.
- First Presidential Election (Feb. 1980): Boycotted. Rationale: participation would legitimize a counter-revolutionary, anti-people regime.
- First Majles Election (March 1980): Not boycotted. Peykar fielded candidates in Tehran, Khuzestan, Kurdistan, Sistan & Baluchestan, Azerbaijan, Bandar Anzali, etc., and endorsed nominees from Fedai, MEK, Rah-e Kargar, Combat for the Liberation of the Working Class, etc., urging voters to help elect them to expose and weaken the regime. With few exceptions (some MEK figures), Peykar's slate failed.
- Iran–Iraq War (Sept. 1980): Prior to full-scale war, amid border clashes, Peykar stated that in case of Iraqi invasion, one must resist and drive the aggressor back. When the war broke out with bombings (e.g., Mehrabad), most members and central cadres saw defense against occupation as necessary. But after further debate—led by two theoreticians ("Ahmad" and "Mohsen," aliases)—the center adopted a new line: the war was reactionary and unjust on both sides; participation was wrong: "The Iran–Iraq War is an unjust and duplicitous war."

Relations with Other Groups

Peykar's relations—active with most, none with the MEK (apart from a fruitless early 1979 contact). It had maintained ties with the Fedai before their split but cut contact with the Majority (as revisionist), keeping relations with the Minority. With KOMALA, relations in Tehran and Kurdistan were deep and broad. During the crackdowns, KOMALA even invited Peykar's leaders to relocate to Kurdistan safe havens to continue ideological work and save their lives; but Peykar's leadership refused, citing "honor in struggle" and influenced—so your text argues—by Taqi Shahram's 1976 emigration mindset about "stagnation." This refusal left leaders in place "shoulder-to-shoulder" with the ranks—only to be killed in the end. Peykar had no direct ties with the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, which it deemed counter-revolutionary. Evidence suggests Peykar's goal in "unity" was largely to absorb remaining "Third Line" groups; it succeeded partially, but the 1981 crisis extinguished it.

Extinction of Peykar

From early 1981, internal fissures emerged over shifts in the ruling bloc's balance and its reflection among political forces. Influenced by the MEK's tactical tilt toward the liberals under Bani-Sadr and one-sided combat with the IRP, Peykar revised its strategic slogan. This new orientation appeared in the famous "Communiqué 110" (*Peykar*, June 15, 1981), arguing that the sharp point of struggle must now be aimed at the IRP, effectively fighting only one wing of power. The communiqué split the organization; many members opposed it as a revisionist, opportunist abandonment of the classic line "Against the IRP, against the liberals—Long live the struggle of the masses," accusing it of preferring reform to revolution.

Meanwhile, arrests by the IRGC surged. In July 1981, a coordinated blow hit Services & Logistics (Khot) and other central organs: logistics, printing/forgery/electronics were struck; many members/supporters were seized; multi-format presses and over 100 automatic rifles were captured. The damage—both in personnel and material—proved irreparable. Members were displaced; leadership lacked safe sites and could not meet regularly.

Ten days later, the center convened and tasked the Security Committee to investigate. Its report concluded the blow resulted from months of surveillance by regime operatives; a substantial part of Peykar had been inside the net without central or Tehran security—or any unit—detecting it. (Later, memoirs by 1980s interrogators—e.g., *Thunder in a Cloudless Sky*—confirmed that in the very period when some "liquidationist" and pseudo-left intellectuals demanded ideological struggle and gatherings in compromised safehouses while withholding resources from leadership, security forces had multiple hideouts under watch.)

In truth, Peykar's collapse reflected both internal (ideological) and external (state repression) causes, with the internal factor decisive. The organization itself framed the crisis as ideological, rooted in revisionism—a deviation from Marxism. A final decision was to be taken at the next central meeting, but before it could occur, in February 1982, the majority of the central leadership and many officials, members, and supporters were arrested.

IRGC units in Tehran uncovered the leadership safehouse along with 29 safehouses, detaining over forty political-military activists. Large weapons depots, communications gear, and printing equipment were seized. Among those arrested: Alireza Sepassi Ashtiani (leader), Hossein Ahmadi Rouhani (chief theoretician), Masoud Jigare'i (organizational brain), plus many others—Ahmad-Ali Rouhani (aka Naser/Hassan), Behjat Mehrabadi (aka A'zam), Monireh Hedayee (aka Soudabeh), Zahra Salim (aka Pari), Ghasem Abedini (aka Akbar/Kaveh/Mojtaba), Mehri Heydarzadeh (aka Zohreh/Goli), Asghar Akbar-Nezhad Oshshagh (aka Manouchehr/Masoud), Edna Samet (aka Zohreh/Tahereh), Masoud Mohammadi (aka Firooz), Fereydoun Azemi (aka Amir), among others.

With these arrests, a crisis already deep became total; over time the organization disintegrated and ceased activity in Iran. Remnants mostly joined Ettehad-e Mobarezān-e Komonist (Union of Communist Militants) and then the Communist Party of Iran; many senior ex-Peykar figures—like Jalal Qa'edi and Saeed Yazdanian—were arrested and executed in the process. According to Torab Haq-Shenas's *From Feyziyeh to Peykar*, by 1981 the only activists who later settled abroad (post-1983) were Dr. Mehrdad Darvish-Pour, Dr. Jalal Ijadi, Majid Nafisi, and Fazel Naderi—some of whose subsequent outlooks, as you put it, would have angered the spirit of Taqi Shahram.

Part Twenty-Four — The Fate of the Left and the Rise of a New Left

When speaking of the fate of the Left in Iran—especially after the heavy repression of the 1980s, the mass executions of 1988, and the large-scale migration of surviving activists into a tailspin—we must stress this: the Left as a phenomenon has always existed everywhere and will continue to exist. Despite state repression and right-wing hostility—and despite the Left's own internal errors—it endures, because society is not static; it keeps transforming. As material conditions change, so too do the subjective forces—agents of change—who increasingly demand to transform the status quo. In short, the Left does not die. Reactionary regimes may annihilate or silence left forces in a given historical moment—there is no shortage of such cases worldwide—but they cannot eradicate the soil and thought of the Left. The struggle for human rights is ultimately the struggle for human freedom; and freedom, without social justice, is meaningless.

Examples abound—both from Iran and elsewhere. After the Communist Party was crushed, the Tudeh Party rose. After Tudeh's repression in 1953 and the National Front's in 1963, the Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas emerged. After the massacres of 1981, in 1983 the Communist Party of Iran—a fusion mainly of "Third Line" remnants and Komala—was formed. In Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Spain, after the slaughter of left currents of previous decades, new left movements gradually returned to the circle of power and at times even took power. Regardless of whether these are "authentic" lefts or only donning the left's garments, they have mobilized people under the banner of justice and freedom.

It must also be underlined—as I noted at the outset while tracing the Left since the Constitutional Revolution—that left thought and practice do not depend on left organizations. The Left is always present—even if, in many places, it operates as an ever-present absence. The media, propaganda, and cinematic attacks of the past decade—especially after the Jina (Mahsa) uprising—plus the constant chorus of neoliberal tribunes denouncing the Left at every turn, are themselves signs that the Left is alive—even as the pillagers of thought and wealth fear even its specter. As defined earlier, this new Left differs from the Russia-derived old Left. Tellingly, the remnants of that Russia-rooted Left—now in the garb of the "10 Mehr" and "Rah-e Tudeh" circles—have aligned with the state to make the independent Left their prime target, because they too grasp that the new Left fights the U.S. and its allies without crawling back to the Russia-line tutelage of the 1980s.

Why don't we see the Left more openly in Iran? Because the absence of a political opening like 1979–1980 has severely constrained broad, public activity among workers and the poor. Yet the Left's footprints are visible across civil arenas—neighborhoods, women's, students', environmental movements—and in the publication of books and journals. These are, after all, part of the Left's basic responsibilities. Crucially, Iran's new Left draws on post-Soviet/post-Chinese ideas—anti-old-Left categories. Today's conditions—people in the streets with slogans like "Water, Power, Life are our inalienable rights"—are themselves part of the same struggle for social justice, the abolition of exploitation, and the overcoming of alienation.

Once upon a time the Left was confined to safehouses, imagining overthrow through assassination and armed clashes, claiming to act in the name of a single stratum—the working class. Today, the realities on the streets, shop floors, and offices show that the Left can gain power—or force

concessions—only through the "society of work and production," by building social movements rooted in civil institutions, not by substitutionism.

Why? In the post-Cold-War world order, the front of work and production has been pressed hard by global capital—oligarchic finance/tech, worldwide production chains exploiting ultra-cheap labor, and a swelling non-productive/service share of global GDP. Unions and wage-earners' associations have weakened and, sometimes out of incapacity, trailed right-wing forces that are plainly anti-labor. Meanwhile, global capital wields digital platforms and AI, saturating public consciousness with a radiography of capital—mixing falsehoods among truths—diverting attention from fundamentals, numbing decision-making under shock-propaganda, all to accelerate the circuits M–C–M′ and C–M–C, minting multi-billionaires whose wealth exceeds some nations' GDP. In such a maelstrom, the Left's intellectuals bear a heavier burden—made worse because many still don't grasp the depth of the catastrophe. They have learned that after the third industrial revolution, the working class alone is no longer the sole revolutionary subject. The emergence of a broader "society of work and production"—in scale and capability—has pushed oligarchic capitalism beyond old lines, even to an apocalyptic imaginary (drawn from scriptural millenarianism). Thus we confront religious fundamentalism and capitalist fundamentalism. In the end, religious fundamentalism serves capitalist fundamentalism, yet both block the demands of the working class and the society of work and production—even if they don't always openly unite.

Therefore the Left must forge a broad alternative to stand against this end-times politics. Just as global capital defends its profits and rule in unison, all who are exploited by it must form a United Front. The front of wage-earners/exploited is far larger than the oligarchs' front—yet lacks power parity. To rebalance, the society of work and production must appropriate technology and AI—feasible given its composition. The precondition is a democratic, popular order grounded in universal democracy and widespread education, especially for women. With these new parameters, the new Left must reconceive Marx's philosophy and class analysis through the lens of a society of work and production—workers, all wage-earners whose labor is expropriated, women and feminists, segments of bureaucrats, and likely public-minded technocrats committed to sustainable development.

Organizationally, a mass formation of this society will be multi-nodal, networked, interwoven, complex; every body within it should have voice and vote, with horizontal decision-chains under universal democracy. Drawing lessons from Tudeh's mass organizing—and its negative lesson of subordinating civil bodies to party apparatus (as after 1979)—the new Left will not try to chain civil movements (Writers' Association, unions, professional guilds) to itself. Its craft is to shape decisions in these movements and strengthen them in finding the right course. Thus the Iranian Left can practice united action with any group that, at any given stage, embraces any segment of the social-revolutionary movement's demands. The sole precondition is to stand within the circle of popular demands. This naturally rules out cooperation with some forces. For example, the shared denominator for united action in Iran is establishing a secular order. The Left cannot, under "unity against dictatorship," ally with the Devil. We will not practice anti-religious bigotry; we openly advocate separation of religion from state and universal law. Happily, after the Islamic Republic's experience, this desire is widespread—even among former supporters and some current insiders. It was also a core demand of "Woman, Life, Freedom." Economically, $1 trillion GDP would underpin social welfare; to reach it, the return of experts and capital/knowledge holders

could accelerate the path. The Left should, without embarrassment, declare its readiness to cooperate with liberals who favor sustainable socio-economic development, to establish a democratic socialist governance akin to the Nordic model.

With this orientation, the new Left must clarify its forward program now—so we're not, thirty years hence, rereading the last thirty years again. Key questions:

1. Today's class composition and the driving force of imminent change.
2. The role of wage-earning strata and their relation to the working class: does the new Left see workers as part of the "society of work and production," or the primary creators of value with others following the proletariat?
3. Nationalities/ethnicities after transition: federalism or center-linked autonomy? What is the new Left's concrete take on self-determination?
4. The place of religious forces and monarchists as self-styled rivals: what are the bounds of united action or coalition with them?
5. The role of women and youth in the expected polity: will the new Left guarantee minimum quotas (parliament, other bodies) for women as a baseline of good governance, or leave it to elections?
6. The role of domestic and foreign investors: do they have a role? Is a China-style path ruled out?
7. Will the new Left advocate separation of religion from state, rule, and education, or merely preach "separation of religion and politics"?
8. The next stage beyond the present: a Democratic Republic or an immediate socialist phase? If socialist, what are its assumptions and model?

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